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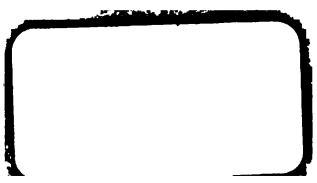

OLD COURT LIFE IN FRANCE.

VOL. II.

OLD COURT LIFE IN FRANCE.

BY

FRANCES ELLIOT,

AUTHOR OF

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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OLD COURT LIFE IN FRANCE.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE KEEPER OF THE ROYAL CONSCIENCE.

Richelieu, thoroughly exasperated, determined to crush the girl who had dared to brave him. He called to his aid his creature Chavigny. Chavigny was intriguing, acute, and superficial; an admirable tool — for he originated nothing. Years ago he had sold himself to Richelieu, but as he always went out of his way to abuse him, the connection was not suspected. Under the direction of the Cardinal, he had entirely gained the King's confidence. His easy good-nature encouraged the shy Louis to tell him all his secrets, and to consult him in all his difficulties.

Chavigny, who up to this time had attached little importance to the King's inclination for the new maid of honour, looking upon it simply as a passing admiration for an attractive girl, who was

too inexperienced to take advantage of his favour, upon being questioned, informed Richelieu that the King wrote to her daily, and that she replied as often. Richelieu at once resolved on his course of action. He would in future see the correspondence himself. Each letter was to be skilfully unsealed by his secretary, Desmaret, and read, before it was delivered.

It was not possible for even the hard, stern Richelieu to peruse these letters unmoved. He had been once young and passionate himself. He could not but appreciate the delicacy and eloquence with which the King veiled his passion, and softened intense love into the semblance of friendship. Nor could he avoid feeling some admiration for the sweet and simple nature that breathed in every line written by the maid of honour. Both were evidently ignorant of the ardour of their mutual attachment. What was to be done? He must consult the King's confessor.

Father Caussin, a Jesuit, had been only nine months confessor to the King. He was learned, conscientious, and guileless. Richelieu had selected him for this important post in the belief that he would assume no political influence over his royal penitent. The General of the order had objected to his appointment on the same grounds. In person

Caussin was tall and spare. His long black cassock hung about his thin figure in heavy folds. His face was pale and emaciated. Yet a kindly smile played about his mouth, and his black eyes beamed with benevolence. Such was the ecclesiastic who seated himself opposite to Richelieu.

"My father," said the Cardinal, saluting him stiffly, and leaning forward and laying his hands on some papers placed beside him on a table, as though they related to what he was about to say.—"I have summoned you on a very grave matter." Nothing could be more solemn than the Cardinal's voice and manner. The pleasant smile faded at once out of the confessor's face. He became as grave, if not as stern, as the Cardinal, leant his head upon his bony hand, and turned his eyes intently upon him. "Circumstances have come to my knowledge," continued Richelieu, "which, in my opinion, justify me in asking you a very searching question." Caussin moved uneasily, and in a somewhat troubled manner interrupted him.

"Your Eminence will not, I trust, desire to trench upon the privacy of my office,—for in that case I could not satisfy you."

Richelieu waved his hand impatiently, placed

one knee over the other with great deliberation, and leant back in his chair. "My father, I am surprised at your insinuation. We are both Churchmen, and, I presume, understand our respective duties. The question that I would ask is one to which you may freely reply. Does it appear to you that his Majesty has of late shown indifference in his spiritual duties?" Caussin drew a long breath, and, though relieved, was evidently unwilling to answer.

"Pardon me, my father," again spoke the Cardinal, a slight tone of asperity perceptible in his mellow voice, "I ask you this question entirely in the interest of the holy order to which you belong. Many benefices have fallen vacant lately, and it is possible, — it is *possible*, I repeat, that I may advise his Majesty to fill up some of them from the ranks of the Company of Jesus." His half-closed eyes rested significantly on Father Caussin as he said these words.

Caussin listened unmoved. "There are, doubtless," said he, "many members of our order who would do honour to your selection, Cardinal. For myself, I want no preferment;—indeed, I should decline it." He spoke with the frankness of perfect sincerity.

Richelieu looked down, and worked the points of his fingers impatiently on the table. His hands were singularly white and shapely, with taper fingers. As a young man he had loved to display them; the habit had remained with him when he was thoughtful or annoyed. "Well, my father," said he, "your answer?"

Caussin eyed the Cardinal suspiciously,—"I am happy to reassure your Eminence; his Majesty is, as usual, in the most pious sentiments."

"Hum!—that is strange, very strange; I fear that the benevolence of your nature, my father—" Caussin drew himself up, and a look as much approaching defiance as it was possible for him to assume passed into his pleasant face. Richelieu did not finish the offensive sentence. "It is strange," he went on to say, "for I have reason to *know*—I ask you for no information, reverend father—that his Majesty's feelings are engaged in a mundane passion which, if encouraged, may lead him from those precepts and exercises in which he has hitherto lived in obedience to the Church."

"To what passion do you allude?" asked Caussin cautiously.

"To the infatuation his Majesty evinces for the new maid of honour, Louise de Lafayette. The

lady is self-willed and romantic. She may lead him into deadly sin."

Caussin started. "I apprehend nothing of the kind," replied he drily.

"True, my father, but that is a matter of opinion. I think differently. Absolution, after repentance," continued the Cardinal pompously, "may wash out even crime, but it is for us,—you, his Majesty's confessor, and I, his minister, both faithful servants of the Holy Father,"—Caussin looked hard at the Cardinal, who was by no means considered orthodox at Rome,—"it is for us to guard him from even the semblance of evil. I have sent for you, my father, to assist me in placing Louise de Lafayette in a convent. It will be at least a measure of precaution. I shall require all your help, my father; will you give it me?" Richelieu, as he asked this important question, narrowly observed Caussin from under his drooping eyelids. The confessor was evidently embarrassed. His kindly countenance was troubled; and he was some time in answering.

"To dedicate a young and pure soul to God," he replied, at length, with evident hesitation, "is truly an acceptable work; but has your Eminence considered that the lady in question is of the most

blameless life, and that by her example and influence his Majesty may be kept in that path of obedience and faith which some other attachment might not insure?" As he asked this question Caussin leaned forwards towards Richelieu, speaking earnestly.

"Father Caussin," said the Cardinal in his hardest manner, and motioning with his hand as though commanding special attention, "we must look in this matter beyond his Majesty's feelings. I have good reason for alarm. A crisis is impending," and he turned again to the papers lying on the table with a significant air. "If Louise de Lafayette has any vocation, let her be advised to encourage it. Consider in what manner you can best bend the King's will to comply. You tell me the lady is a good Catholic; I rejoice to hear it. She comes of a family of heretics. She may be sincere, though I much doubt it. At all events, she must be removed; simply as a matter of precaution, my father, I repeat, she must be removed. Let me beg you to consult the General of your order upon this matter immediately. Understand me, I am advising this simply as a matter of precaution, nothing more." All this time Caussin had listened intently to the Cardinal. The troubled look on

his face had deepened into one of infinite sadness. His brow was knit, but there were doubt and hesitation in his manner.

"I can only consent to assist your Eminence," he replied, in a low voice, after some moments of deep thought, "on the condition that the lady herself freely consents. I can permit no violence to be done to her inclinations, nor to the will of his Majesty. If the lady is ready to offer up herself to the Church through my means, it will doubtless redound to the credit of our order; but she shall not be forced."

"Certainly not, certainly not," interposed Richelieu, in a much more affable tone. "I do not know why your reverence should start such a supposition."

"I will consult our General, Cardinal," continued Caussin; "but I am bound to say that the influence the lady has hitherto exercised has been most legitimate, most orthodox, altogether in favour of our order, to which she is devoted, and of the Church. She is a most pious lady."

"All the more fit for the privilege I propose to bestow upon her," answered Richelieu, with unction; "she will be safe from temptation within the bosom of the Church, a blessing we, my father,"—and Richelieu affected to heave a deep

sigh, and cast up his eyes to heaven, "we, who live in the world, cannot attain. We act then in concert, my father," he added quickly, in his usual manner, "we act for the good of his Majesty's soul?"

Caussin bowed acquiescence, but mistrust and perplexity were written upon every line of his honest face, as he observed the evident satisfaction evinced by the Cardinal at his compliance.

Richelieu rose: "We will force no one's inclination, my father," he said blandly, "but all possibility of scandal must be removed. You must at once prepare his Majesty. It will be a good work, and will greatly recommend you to your order. Caussin, with a look of the deepest concern, bowed profoundly and withdrew. When he was alone, the Cardinal re-seated himself and fell into a deep muse. "Now," said he, at length, speaking to himself, "her fate is sealed. I will take care that her vocation shall be perfect. This presumptuous girl shall soon come to rejoice, ay, rejoice, that she is permitted to take refuge in a convent. As for Caussin, he is a fool. I must remove him immediately."

Richelieu, as he said of himself, never halted in his resolves. Caussin was shortly sent off by a

lettre de cachet to Rennes, narrowly escaping an intimation from the Cardinal to his Superior that it would be well to exercise his devotion to the order as a missionary in Canada.

CHAPTER XL.

A NOBLE RESOLVE.

THE Court had removed from the Louvre to Saint-Germain, always the favourite abode of the melancholy monarch.

Louis suffered tortures from the galling restraints his position entailed upon him in his intercourse with Mademoiselle de Lafayette. He rarely saw her alone. When he addressed her, he was conscious that every eye was fixed upon them. Their correspondence, carried on by means of Chavigny, was, he felt, full of danger. His only comforter in his manifold troubles was this same treacherous Chavigny. Prompted by the Cardinal, Chavigny urged the King, on every possible occasion, to make some arrangement with Mademoiselle de Lafayette to meet in private. "If she loves you," said this unworthy tool, "if you really possess her heart, she will long to meet your Majesty with greater

freedom as much as you can do. It is for you to make some such proposal to her. Do it, Sire; do it without delay, or I assure you the lady will think you careless and indifferent." Thus spoke Chavigny. Louis listened, meditated on what he said, and was convinced. He gave himself up to the most entrancing day-dreams.

The season was summer. The weather was hot, and the tall windows of the great saloon were thrown open. The Court had gathered round the Queen, who was engaged in a lively conversation with Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the young daughter of the Duc d'Orléans. Seeing that her services were not required, Louise de Lafayette, pensive and silent, stole away to the balcony outside the windows. She stood alone, lost in her own thoughts. With noiseless steps Louis approached her. He lent by her side over the balustrade, bending his eyes on the broad plains towards Paris.

"You are thoughtful, Sire," said Louise timidly. "Will you tell me your thoughts?"

"If I do," replied Louis, casting a fond glance upon her, "will you trust me with yours?"

A delicious tremor passed through her whole frame. She cast down her large grey eyes, and

smiled. "Indeed I trust you, Sire," she murmured softly; "you know I do."

"But trust me more,—let our communion be more intimate. A brother's love is not more pure than mine," whispered the King; "but," and he hesitated and blushed, "I have never enjoyed the privilege of a brother." Louise raised her eyes inquiringly. The King was greatly confused. "A brother—" and he stopped. Then, seeing her earnest look of curiosity—"A brother," he repeated, "salutes his sister: I have never enjoyed that privilege, Louise." He was scarcely audible. "Let my self-denial, at least, secure me all your confidence."

"Oh, Sire, you have it, entire and unreserved; you know it. I might distrust myself, but you, Sire, never, never!"

"How happy you make me!" returned the King, and a sickly smile overspread his haggard face. "I understand—I appreciate your attachment to me; but oh, mademoiselle, how can my feeble words express mine to you?—how can I describe that which is without bounds—without limit? You can live without me. You can find solace in your own perfection, in the admiration of those around you—but I, I am nothing without you. I am a

mere blank—a blot upon a luxurious Court—an offence to my superb wife. No one cares for my happiness—not even for my existence, but you. When I cannot approach you, I am overcome by despair. Oh, Louise, give yourself up to me, in pity—without fear, without restraint. Let me see you every day,—let me be encouraged by your words, led by your counsels, soothed by your pity, blessed by your sight. You say you do not doubt me. What then do you fear?"

The maid of honour looked at him with tearful eyes. His earnestness, his desolation, his entreaties, melted her heart. Her unconscious love made her pulses beat as quickly as his own.

"You know that I am devoted to you,—what more can I say?" she whispered softly.

"I have a favour to ask you," said Louis anxiously,—"a favour so great I hesitate to name it." He was greatly agitated. At this moment the passionate love he felt animated him with new life, and lent a charm to his countenance it had never borne before.

"A favour, Sire?—it is granted before you speak. How is it that you have concealed from me anything I can do to gratify you?"

"Then I am satisfied,"—the King heaved a sigh

of relief,—" what I ask depends entirely on you. You will grant it?"

"Am I to promise?"

"Well, only give me your word; that is enough."

"Sire, I give you my word; from the bottom of my heart, I give you my word. Tell me what it is you desire." And she raised her face towards the King, who contemplated her with silent rapture.

"Not now—not now," murmured he, in a faltering voice; "I dare not; it would require too long an explanation,—we might be interrupted," and he turned and glanced at the scene behind him, —at Anne of Austria, blazing with diamonds, radiant with regal beauty, her silvery laugh surmounting the hum of conversation. He saw the brilliant crowd that thronged around her where she sat. Great princes, illustrious ministers, historic nobles, chivalric soldiers, grave diplomatists, stately matrons, ministers of state, her ladies in waiting, and the five other maids of honour, in the glory of golden youth. He saw the dazzling lights, the fluttering feathers, the gorgeous robes, the sparkling jewels, standing out from the painted walls,—all the glamour of a luxurious Court. Then

he gazed at the sweet face of the lonely girl whose loving eyes were bent upon him awaiting his reply,—his soul sank within him.

"Would to God I were not King of France," he exclaimed abruptly, following the tenor of his thoughts. Then, seeing her wonder at this sudden outburst, he added, "The favour I ask of you shall be made known to you in writing. This evening you shall receive a letter from me; but,"—and he drew closer to her and spoke almost fiercely,—"remember you have pledged yourself to me—you cannot, you dare not withdraw your word. If you do,"—and an agonized look came into his face,—"you will drive me to madness." Saying these words, he suddenly disappeared. She was again left standing alone on the balcony.

Louise de Lafayette was startled, but not alarmed. The notion that the King was capable of making any indecorous proposition to her never for a moment occurred to her; at the same time she felt the utmost curiosity to know what this secret might be. She formed a thousand different conjectures, each further than the other from the truth. On entering her room at night, she found a letter from the King. She hastily tore it open, and read as follows:—

"I have long adored you, and you only. During the whole time that you have been at Court, I have been able but thrice to address you alone, and to chance only did I even then owe that inexpressible privilege. It is impossible for me to endure this restraint any longer. If you feel as I do, you will not desire it. I have therefore commanded that my hunting-lodge at Versailles should be arranged as much as possible in accordance with your taste. There is a garden laid out, filled with the flowers you love; there are secluded lawns; there is the boundless forest. Above all, there is freedom. Come then, my Louise, and share with me this rural retreat—come where we can meet, unrestrained by the formalities of my Court. Bring with you any friend you please. At Versailles I hope to spend part of every week in your company. My happiness will be perfect; you will find me the most grateful of men. You will have nothing to fear. Do you dread calumny? Who would dare to attack a lady as pure as yourself? May I not claim your consent when I rely on your promise to grant whatever I ask? I feel that you cannot deny me, for you have repeated a thousand times that you trust my principles. You cannot doubt my honour. To refuse

me would only be to insult me. Surely, Louise, you would not do that! It would wound me to the very soul. It would destroy every hope of my future life.

(Signed) "Louis."

When Mademoiselle de Lafayette read this artful letter, which had been composed by Chavigny under the direction of Richelieu, and copied out by the King, she was utterly confounded. The fatal veil which had so long concealed the truth fell from her eyes. Even to a girl pure and simple as herself, all further delusion was impossible. This letter and the feelings that dictated it were not to be misunderstood.

"Merciful heavens!" cried she, clasping her hands, "with what a tone of authority, with what assurance, he proposes to dishonour me! This, then, is the attachment I believed to be so pure! What! does he, the husband of the Queen of France, suppose that I would encourage a guilty passion? Wretch that I am! Instead of helping him, I have led him into sin! I had no right to engross his thoughts. He is already estranged from his wife, and I have severed them still further! O God! what will the Queen think of me? How

can I atone for this horrible sin? I must—I will—reconcile them. Then God may forgive my involuntary crime!"

Again and again, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she read and re-read the letter. She pressed the paper to her lips. The next moment she dashed it on the floor in an agony of remorse.

"Oh, how can I reply?" sobbed she. "What can I say to temper the blow which must sever us? He will be in despair—he will die. But my reputation, my honour—his own—his duty to the Queen! No, I will never consent to such degradation—my soul revolts at the thought! How gladly would I sacrifice my life for him, but I cannot commit a sin. I must leave the palace, I must go—Whither?"

As she listened to the echo of her own words, an unformed thought suddenly darted into her mind. Go—yes, she would go where none could follow. Youth, beauty, wealth, the sacrifice should be complete. She would prove, even in separation, how great had been her love. "*There is no other way*," she said, speaking aloud, and an angelic smile lit up her face. She cast herself upon her knees, and prayed in peace. Her prayer finished, she took up her pen and replied thus to the King:—

"Your Majesty desires that our interviews should no longer be in the presence of witnesses. Before knowing what was required of me, I promised to comply. I will not withdraw my word; but I entreat of your Majesty the liberty of myself selecting the place where these private interviews are to be held. When I have received your Majesty's assent, I will inform you where this place is to be. In eight days' time I shall be prepared to receive you. Your Majesty can then judge of the extent of my confidence, and of the unbounded devotion I feel towards you.

"LOUISE DE LAFAYETTE."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SACRIFICE.

NEXT morning, as soon as it was light, Louise sent for the King's confessor. She showed him the King's letter, and confided to him her resolution. Caussin listened in silence; but the kindly old man, priest though he was, could not restrain his tears—so touching was her innocence, so heartfelt her sorrow. He understood the simple goodness of her heart; he trembled at the sacrifice she was imposing on herself; but he could not combat her determination. He promised, therefore, to assist in making the needful arrangements, and he pledged himself to support the King in the trial awaiting him.

The coach was in waiting which was to bear her to her future home, when all at once she recollected she had still one final sacrifice to make. The letters of the King, which she always carried about her, were still intact within the silken cover

in which she preserved them. She drew these letters from her bosom, and gazed on them in silent agony. Her eyes were blinded by tears. She dared not read them again, for she knew they would but increase her grief. As she held them in her hand, remorse at what she had done preponderated over every feeling. Thus to have enthralled a husband belonging to another—her sovereign and her mistress—came suddenly before her in its true light. She felt she had forgotten her duty. Once more she kissed the crumpled leaves over which her fingers had so often passed; she deluged them with her tears. Then she lit a taper and set fire to the whole.

She sat immovable before the burning fragments; her eyes fixed, her hands clasped. As the flame rose, glistened, and then melted away into light particles of dust that the morning air, blowing in from the open window, bore away fluttering in the breeze, she seemed to look upon the death of her love. "Alas!" cried she, "now all is over." Vows of eternal constancy, entreaties that would melt a heart of stone, confidence beyond all limit, affection that enshrouded her in folds of unutterable tenderness—gone,—vanished into air! Such was the image of her life: a life bright in

promise, gay and dazzling, to smoulder down into ashes, too fragile even to claim a resting-place.

Louise de Lafayette wrote a few lines to the Duchesse de Sennécy, praying her to convey her dutiful salutations to her Majesty, and to request her dismissal from the post of maid of honour, which, she said, "she felt she had fulfilled so ill." Then she addressed the following note to the King:—"I request your Majesty to meet me this day week, at noon, in the parlour of the Convent of the Daughters of Mary, in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine."

When the King read these lines his heart sank within him. The austerity of the place, a rendezvous in a convent of peculiar sanctity, where he knew Mademoiselle de Lafayette always resorted at the solemn season of Lent and Passion Week, where he could only converse with her between double bars, was not the place of meeting of which he had fondly dreamed! Yet his natural delicacy made him fully appreciate the modesty of Louise and the gentle rebuke she administered to him for his too pressing solicitation in naming a place of meeting. At the convent, although they would certainly be alone, no scandal could possibly attach to the interview. More than this he never for an

instant imagined. The habits of piety in which Mademoiselle de Lafayette lived, and her frequent retreats for religious purposes, raised in his mind no suspicion. He should see her, and see her alone, undisturbed, unwatched. On that thought he dwelt with rapture; time would, he hoped, do the rest.

Punctually, at noon, the King arrived at the Convent of the Daughters of Mary. He was received by the Abbess in person, and conducted into the parlour. Here she left him. A moment more, a curtain was withdrawn, and, behind double bars of iron, Louise de Lafayette stood before him. She wore the dark brown robes and corded girdle of the order, the long white veil of the noviciate falling round her lovely face. The King stood transfixed, his eyes riveted upon her.

"Forgive me, Sire," said she, in a voice full of sweetness, "forgive me for having dared to dispose of myself without your leave. But, Sire, a too fervent attachment had led us both into danger. I had forgotten my duty in the love I felt for you,—your Majesty forgot you were a husband. That letter, in which you proposed meeting me at Versailles, opened my eyes to the truth. God be thanked, there was yet time for repentance.

This morning I have taken the white veil, and in a year I shall pronounce the final vows. My life will still be passed with you, Sire; but it will be a life of prayer." As she spoke she smiled sadly, and awaited his reply.

"Great God!" exclaimed Louis at length, when he could find words. "Is this a vision? Are you an angel already glorified?" He sank upon his knees before her.

"Rise, Sire," said she solemnly; "such a posture befits neither the dignity of your station nor the sacredness of mine. I am no angel, but still your tender friend; a friend who watches over you, who only lives to remind you of your duties. You will share my heart with the holy virgins among whom I live, the saints in heaven, and my God. Let not even the tomb divide us—live, Sire, such a life that we may be reunited among the spirits of the just."

"Oh, Louise!" exclaimed Louis, in a voice choked with emotion; "Louise, who alone fills my despairing, my solitary heart! at your feet I abjure all profane, all unholy thoughts. Speak—command me! my spirit follows you. But, alas!" and he rose to his feet and wrung his hands in bitterest anguish, "what is to become of me in the midst of my detestable Court? Suffer me to follow your

example; let me too, within the walls of a cloister, seek that resignation and courage which make you so sublime."

"Good heavens, Sire!" exclaimed Louise de Lafayette, "what do I hear? You, a sovereign, a husband, bury yourself in a cloister! Our situations are utterly unlike. I, a solitary girl, have but withdrawn from a world to which you were my only tie. Your glory, the glory of France, your own welfare, and the welfare of the Queen, are to you sacred duties. And now, Sire, listen to me," and she approached close to the bars which divided them, and a look of the old melting tenderness passed for a moment over her beautiful face, "Sire, if ever I have been dear to you, listen. The sin for which I feel most poignant sorrow — the sin which years, nay, a life of expiation cannot wipe out—is—that I have by my selfish, my miserable attachment, alienated you from the Queen." Louis was about to interrupt her, but she signed to him to be silent. "I know, Sire, what you would say," she broke in hastily,—"that our attachment has in no way altered your relations towards her Majesty. True, it is so; but my influence over you ought to have been devoted to reunite you. It ought to have been my privilege to render both

your Majesties happy as man and wife, to give heirs to France, to strengthen the Government. Alas, alas! I have sinned almost beyond forgiveness!" and for awhile she broke into passionate sobs, which all her self-command could not restrain. "Her Majesty, Sire, is a most noble lady, beautiful, generous, loyal, courageous. For twenty years she, the greatest queen in Europe, has been neglected, almost scorned by you her husband. Under these trials her lofty spirit has not flinched —she has been true to you and to herself. Temptation, provocation, nay, insults have not shaken her virtue. Believe nothing against her, Sire—her soul is as lovely as her body. Sire, the Queen is childless, devote your whole life to her and to France; tend her, protect her, love her. Then, and then only, shall I be reconciled to God." As she spoke her sweet grey eyes turned towards heaven, her countenance was transfigured as in an ecstasy; no saint standing within a sculptured shrine could be more pure, more holy.

The King gazed at her awestruck. "Dispose of me as you will," murmured he; "command my life —but, remember that now I have lost you, happiness is gone from me for ever!"

"Adieu, Sire," said Mademoiselle de Lafayette.

"The hour-glass warns me that our interview is over. Return in six months and tell me that I have been obeyed."

She drew the dark curtain across the bars, and the Abbess entered. Louis returned hastily to Saint-Germain.

CHAPTER XLII.

MONSIEUR LE GRAND.

In the broad valley of the Loire, between Tours and Saumur, the train stops at the small station of Cinq-Mars. This station lies beside the Loire, which glides by in a current so broad and majestic, as to suggest a series of huge lakes, with banks bordered by sand and scrub, rather than a river. On either side of the Loire run ranges of low hills, their grassy surface gashed and scored by many a rent revealing the chalky soil beneath, their summits fringed with scanty underwood, and dotted with groups of gnarled and knotted oaks and ragged fir-trees, the rough roots clasping cairns of rock and blocks of limestone. In the dimples of these low hills lie snugly sheltered villas, each within its own garden and policy. These villas thicken as the small township of Cinq-Mars is approached,—a nest of bright little houses, gay streets, and tall chimneys telling of provincial commerce, all

clustering beneath chalky cliffs which rise abruptly behind, rent by many a dark fissure and blackened watercourse. Aloft, on a grassy marge, where many an old tree bends its scathed trunk to the prevailing wind, among bushes and piled-up heaps of stones, rise the ruins of a feudal castle. Two gate towers support an arch, through which the blue sky peeps, and some low, broken walls, without form and void, skirt the summit of the cliff. This ruin, absolutely pathetic in its desolate loneliness, is all that remains of the ancestral castle of the Cöiffiers de Cinq-Mars, Marquis d'Effiat. From this hearth and from these shattered walls, now razed "*to the height of infamy*," sprung that handsome, shallow, ambitious coxcomb, known as the Marquis de Cinq-Mars, who succeeded Mademoiselle de Lafayette in the favour of Louis XIII.

Deprived of Louise de Lafayette, the King's spirits languished. In spite of his partial reconciliation with Anne of Austria, and the birth of a son, he was sullen and gloomy, spoke to no one, and desired no one to speak to him. When etiquette required his presence in the Queen's apartments, he seated himself in a corner, yawned, and fell asleep. The internal malady of which he died had already undermined his always feeble

frame. His condition was altogether so critical, that the Cardinal looked round for a companion to solace his weariness. Henri de Cinq-Mars had lately come up to Paris from Touraine. In years he was a boy, under twenty. He was gentle, adroit, and amusing, but weak, and the Cardinal believed he had found in him the facile instrument he sought.

Cinq-Mars was presented to the King. Louis was at once prepossessed by his handsome person and distinguished manners. Cinq-Mars, accustomed from infancy to field sports and country life, angling in the deep currents of the Loire and the Indre, hunting wild boars and deer in the dense forests of Azay and of Chanteloup, or flying his gear-falcon from the summits of his native downs, struck a sympathetic chord in the sad King's heart. One honour after the other was heaped upon him; finally he was made Grand Seneschal of France and Master of the Horse. From this time he dropped the patronymic of "Cinq-Mars," and was known at Court as "Monsieur le Grand," one of the greatest personages in France. For a time all went smoothly. King and minister smiled upon the petulant stripling, whose witty sallies and boyish audacity were tempered by the highest

breeding. He was always present when the Cardinal conferred with the King, and from the first gave his opinion with much more freedom than altogether pleased the minister, who simply intended him for a puppet, not for an adviser. When the Cardinal remonstrated, Cinq-Mars shook his scented curls, pulled his lace ruffles, talked of loyalty and gratitude to the King, and of personal independence, in a manner the Cardinal deemed highly unbecoming and inconvenient. Monsieur le Grand cared little for what the Cardinal thought, and did not take the trouble to hide this opinion. He cared neither for the terrible minister nor for the eccentric Louis, whom he often treated, even in public, with contempt. It was the old story. Confident in favour, arrogant in power, he made enemies every day.

Monsieur le Grand, however, passed his time with tolerable ease when relieved of the King's company, specially in the house of Marion de l'Orme, Rue des Tournelles. He was presented to her by Saint-Evrémond, and fell at once a victim to her wiles. Marion was the Aspasia of the day, and the charm of her *entourage* was delightful to him after the restraints of a dull and formal Court. Here he met d'Ablancourt, La Chambre, and Cal-

prenéde, the popular writers of the age. The Abbé de Gondi and Scarron came also, and even the prudish Mademoiselle de Scudéri did not disdain to be present at these *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. Marion de l'Orme, then only thirty, was in the zenith of her beauty. Her languishing dark eyes exercised an absolute fascination over Cinq-Mars from the first instant they met. Her affected reserve, the refinement of her manners, the *entrain* of her society, free without license, captivated him. He believed her to be virtuous, and desired to make her his wife. Marion de l'Orme was to become *Madame la Grande!*

This was precisely what that astute lady had angled for. Hence her reserve, her downcast eyes, her affected indifference. She saw that she was dealing with a vain, ignorant boy, who, in her hands, was helpless as an infant. Truly, he was madly in love with her, but he was a minor, and under the guardianship of the Dowager Marquise de Cinq-Mars, his mother, who might possibly not view an alliance with Mademoiselle Marion de l'Orme as an honour to the ancestral tree of the Effiats de Cinq-Mars. The marriage must be secret. Early one morning they started from the Rue des Tournelles in a coach, and never stopped until they had

reached the old castle among the hills of Touraine, above the feudatory village of Cinq-Mars. In the chapel of that now ruined pile their faith was plighted. Marion promised love, Cinq-Mars constancy. They were incapable of either. For eight days the old castle rang with the sounds of revelry. Cinq-Mars and Marion were as in a fairy palace; life was but a long enchantment. But at the end of that time Nemesis appeared in the shape of the Dowager Marchioness, to whose ears the report of these merry-makings came at Paris. Cinq-Mars replied to his mother that it was all a *passe-temps*, and that Mademoiselle de l'Orme—well—was still Mademoiselle de l'Orme; that he loved the Principessa Maria di Gonzaga (to whom the handsome profligate had, indeed, paid his addresses before leaving Paris, the better to throw dust in the eyes of the world), and that he should shortly return to Paris and his duty with his Majesty.

The mediæval chatelaine, however, was not to be deceived. She knew of the secret marriage, and nothing could exceed her rage. That Marion de l'Orme should sit on the feudal dais upon the seigneurial throne—that she should wear her jewelled coronet, should eat out of her silver dish, and inhabit her apartments—the thing was

atrocious, scandalous, impossible. She flew to the Cardinal, with whom she had some friendship, and informed him of what had occurred. The Cardinal, who had formerly favoured Marion de l'Orme with more than his regard, was as much incensed as herself. That his protégé, Cinq-Mars, should supplant him, made him, old as he was, furiously jealous. That Cinq-Mars should dare to abandon the splendid position he himself had assigned him, leave the morbid Louis a prey to any adventurous scoundrel whose adroit flattery or affected sympathy might in a few hours render him arbiter of the Court and master of the kingdom, was, to Richelieu's thinking, an unpardonable crime. The artful prelate immediately took his measures. A royal ordinance was speedily framed, making all marriages contracted by persons under age, and without the consent of guardians, null and void!

Cinq-Mars returned to Court indignant, insolent, defiant; swearing vengeance against the meddling Cardinal, and ready to enter into any scheme for his destruction. Mademoiselle Marion de l'Orme reopened her salon in the Rue des Tournelles.

As for Louis, from whom the knowledge of this little escapade had been carefully concealed, he received back the truant with greater favour than

ever. Cinq-Mars, confident in the King's attachment, and looking on him as too feeble to combat his own audacious projects, spoke words which Louis had not heard since the beloved voice of Louise de Lafayette had uttered them. "He ought to rid himself of the Cardinal, and rule for himself," said Monsieur Le Grand; "if not by fair, then by foul means." "*Let Richelieu die*," cried Cinq-Mars, "as he has made others die—the best blood in France: Montmorenci, Chalais, Saint-Preuil, Marillac, and so many others." It is certain that the King listened to these proposals favourably. He actually consented to conspire against himself and the State which he governed. Louis was too stupid to realise the absurdity of his position. He permitted Cinq-Mars to coquet with the Spanish Government, in order to insure the support of Spanish troops to be sent from the Netherlands to defend Sedan against the Cardinal and his own army in case of failure. But Richelieu, now fully alive to the dangerous ascendancy of Cinq-Mars,—for he had spies everywhere, specially the soft-spoken Chavigny, who was always about the King,—openly taxed his Sovereign with treachery, in a message borne to him by the Marquis de Mortémart. Louis was dumb-foundered and terrified. He wrote a letter

that very same day, addressed to the Chancellor Séguier, apologising for his seeming infidelity to his minister. "He did not deny," said he, "that Monsieur le Grand desired to compass the Cardinal's death," but, with incredible meanness, he added, "that he had never listened to him." Monsieur le Grand, whose weak head was by this time completely turned, fully believing himself invincible, openly discussed what he should do when he was himself prime minister. Suspecting Louis of being too weak to be his only supporter, he turned to Gaston, Duc d'Orléans. Monsieur, whose life, like that of his brother's, singularly repeats itself, bethinking himself of early times and of a certain moonlight meeting on the terrace of Saint-Germain, at once addressed himself to the Queen. But she had already suffered too much to allow herself again to be drawn into danger. When Monsieur detailed the plot, and asked her significantly, "What news she had lately had from her brother, the King of Spain?" she answered that she had had no news, and instantly changed the conversation. This did not at all cool Monsieur's ardour, such as it was. Three times he had been banished from France for treason, and three times he had returned, as ready

as ever, with or without the Queen, to conspire, to betray, and to be again banished. So the traitor prince and the vain-glorious favourite, both intensely hating Richelieu, laid their heads together to destroy him by means of Spain. To them was joined the Marquis de Thou, one of the *jeunesse dorée* of the Court, along with Fontrailles, secretary to Monsieur. The great Cardinal, sitting in the Palais Royal like a huge spider in his web, ready to pounce upon his prey as soon as it had reached the precise spot where he intended to seize it, was familiar with every detail. Monsieur was to receive four hundred thousand crowns in order to raise levies in France; he was also to declare war against France in concert with Spain.

The Cardinal was to be assassinated or imprisoned for life; Gaston was to be proclaimed regent for his nephew Louis XIV. It was the old story, only, now an heir was born to the throne, Monsieur did not dare to claim the first place. Fontrailles, a creature of his own, he allowed to be sent into Spain. The treaty was signed at Madrid by Fontrailles, on the part of Monsieur and Cinq-Mars, and by the King of Spain on his own part. This done, Fontrailles flew back to France, with the precious document stitched in his clothes. Scarcely

was the ink dry, before Richelieu was provided with a copy.

The Court was at Narbonne, on the Mediterranean, whither Cinq-Mars had led the King, in order to be near the Spanish frontier. Richelieu was at this time greatly indisposed, and in partial disgrace. He hung about the Rhone, sometimes at Tarascon, near Avignon, sometimes at Valence, conveniently near to be informed by Chavigny of everything that happened, who, deep in Louis's confidence, pendulated between the King and the minister. At the fitting moment, Chavigny requested a formal audience. It was the afternoon of the same day that Fontrailles had returned to Narbonne, the treaty with Spain still stitched in his clothes. Contrary to custom, when Chavigny knocked at the King's door, Louis requested Monsieur le Grand to retire. This alone ought to have aroused his suspicions. While Chavigny talked with the King, Cinq-Mars, ashamed of letting the Court see his exclusion from the room, lolled in the ante-room reading a story. Fontrailles found him there.

"How now, Monsieur le Grand," said he, "do you allow his most Christian Majesty to give an audience at which you are not present? You are getting him into bad habits."

"It is only Chavigny," replied Cinq-Mars, not taking his eyes off his book; "he can have nothing particular to say, for he is here every day. I am weary of the King's company. I have been with him all day, and I want to finish this story, which is much more interesting than his stupid talk." And Cinq-Mars threw himself back in his easy-chair, and resumed his reading.

"Ah, Monsieur le Grand," said Fontrailles, smiling at him curiously, "fortune favours you. You are a beautiful man. Look at me, with my hump" (Fontrailles was deformed); "I use my eyes; I am going to-night to meet Monsieur, before I leave Narbonne. I have brought him that little present from Madrid you know of. I have it safe here in my pocket," and Fontrailles tapped his side and grinned. "Come with me, Monsieur le Grand," said he, coaxingly, and he tried to take his hand, but Cinq-Mars repulsed him. "Come with me; believe me, the air of Narbonne is heavy at this time of year. I am not sure that it is not deadly, very deadly, indeed—especially for you, Monsieur le Marquis. A little change will do your health good. I am going. Come with me where we can breathe;" and Fontrailles laughed a short dry laugh, and looked out of the window upon the

blue expanse of ocean, whose waves beat against the yellow shores of the Mediterranean.

"I pray you, Fontrailles, do not trouble me," said Cinq-Mars, looking up over his book and yawning. "I really must have some time to myself, or I shall die. Besides, I want to see his Majesty when Chavigny goes; he is staying longer than usual, I think."

"Yes, Monsieur le Grand, too long for a man coming from the Cardinal, methinks."

Fontrailles still stood watching Cinq-Mars. His deep-set eyes were fixed upon him intently, as Cinq-Mars, with perfect indifference, went on reading his story. Fontrailles passed his hand thoughtfully over his brow two or three times. A look of pity came into his face as he contemplated Cinq-Mars, still reading. He was so young, so fresh, so magnificent; his golden locks long and abundant; his pleasant face faultless in feature; his delicate hands; his perfumed clothes,—all so perfect! Should he try to save him? A tear gathered in the eye of the hardened conspirator.

"Monsieur le Grand," said he softly, stepping up nearer to Cinq-Mars and placing his hand on his red and silver shoulder-knot—"Monsieur le Grand, I say——"

"What, Fontrailles, are you not gone yet? *Ma foi!* I thought you were far on your road to Monsieur ——"

"No, Monsieur le Grand; no, I am not gone yet."

Cinq-Mars put down his book, sat upright, and looked at him.

"What the devil do you want with me, Fontrailles? I will meet you and Monsieur le Duc to-morrow. For to-night, peace."

"Have you no suspicion of what Chavigny is saying to the King all this time, Marquis?" asked Fontrailles with an ominous grin.

"None, my friend; but I shall hear it all before his *coucher*. His most gracious Majesty is incapable of lying down to rest before telling me every syllable," and Cinq-Mars snapped his finger and thumb contemptuously towards the door of the room within which Louis was closeted with Chavigny.

"Are you quite sure of the King, Monsieur le Grand?" asked Fontrailles significantly, still leaning over Cinq-Mars and pressing his hand upon his shoulder-knot. "It is needful for you to be quite sure of him. His Majesty is apt to be weak and treacherous."

Cinq-Mars nodded his head; then, as if some-

thing had suddenly struck him, he rose, and in his turn began to gaze curiously at Fontrailles, whose manner and countenance were strangely expressive of some unspoken fear.

"You are very tall, Monsieur le Grand," said Fontrailles abruptly, speaking low, with his hand placed over his eyes, the better to contemplate Cinq-Mars, now drawn up to his full height, and staring at him with wonder; "you are very tall," he repeated, "and I am such a little man. You are very handsome, too—the handsomest gentleman in all France—and very gracious to me also—very kind and gracious."

Fontrailles spoke thoughtfully, as a man who turned some important matter over in his mind.

"Have you come here only to tell me this, Fontrailles?" answered Cinq-Mars, laughing, and again he yawned, passed his jewelled fingers through his clustering locks, and again took up the book which he had laid down on a table beside him, and rescated himself. Fontrailles, however, had never taken his eyes off him. His gaze had deepened into an expression of deep sorrow, although he spoke jestingly. Whatever train of thought occupied him, it had not been broken by what Cinq-Mars had just said.

"You are very tall," he again repeated, as if speaking to himself, in a peculiar voice; "so tall, indeed, that you could do without your head, Monsieur le Grand, and yet be taller than I am. Perhaps this makes you careless. I am short, and I could not afford to lose my head—so—I am going to leave Narbonne instantly. The air here is as unwholesome to my constitution as it is to yours. Marquis, pray do believe me. Will you come with me—the tall man with the little one?—both needing a change. Will you come?"

Cinq-Mars did not heed him a whit. Fontrailles laid his hand heavily on the thick shock of Monsieur le Grand's golden curls.

"No, *mille diables*, no!" roared Cinq-Mars in a rage, shaking him off; "I will not go. Why should I go? For God's sake leave me. I am just at the catastrophe of my story, and you keep on tormenting me like a gadfly."

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Grand," replied Fontrailles submissively, "I did but advise you for your good. I desire your company for the sake of that comely head of yours; but, as I said, you are tall, and I am short, which makes a great difference. It is a long journey across the mountains of France into the Low Countries," added he,

sighing. "That will be my road—a long and weary road. It might fatigue your excellency. I am going, Monsieur le Marquis. I am gone—Adieu!"

Cinq-Mars did not look up, and Fontrailles, turning upon him a last look full of pity, disappeared.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DEATH ON THE SCAFFOLD.

When Chavigny left the King, Cinq-Mars entered the royal chamber. Louis was silent, absorbed, and melancholy—would answer no questions, and abruptly dismissed the favourite on the plea that he was fatigued and needed rest.

Monsieur le Grand was naturally surprised at the change. The significant words of Fontrailles recurred to him; too late he repented his careless indifference to the friendly warning. But after all, if the King failed him, there was Monsieur and there was the treaty. What had he, Cinq-Mars, to fear when the King's brother had so deeply compromised himself? The Cardinal, too, was ill—very ill; he might die. Still, as he turned to his own suite of apartments his mind misgave him. The King had not told him one word of his interview with Chavigny; and although Chavigny would have denied it upon oath on the consecrated wafer, Cinq-

Mars knew he was the Cardinal's creature and his go-between with the King.

When Cinq-Mars reached his rooms he found a letter from his friend, De Thou. "Fly," said this letter—"fly instantly. I have certain intelligence that the Cardinal is acquainted with every particular of the treaty signed at Madrid. For myself I have nothing to fear; but you have incurred the deadly hatred of Richelieu."

Thereupon Cinq-Mars, hurriedly disguised himself in a Spanish cloak, with a Sombrero hat slouched over his face, stole out of the prefecture where the King was staying, and made his way as fast as he could run to the city gates. They were closed. Then, fully aroused to the urgency of his position, the strange words of Fontrailles ringing in his ears, he sought out the abode of a humble friend, whom he had recommended to serve the Court with mules for the journeying to the south from Paris — a man of Touraine, whom he had known from his boyhood. He roused him from sleep—for the night had now closed in—and acquainted him with his danger. The faithful muleteer did his best. He hid him under some loose hay with the mules in the stable. It was in vain. Cinq-Mars had been seen and tracked from the

prefecture to the muleteer's house, and the scented exquisite—whose word a few hours before ruled the destiny of France—was dragged out headlong from the hay, his fine clothes torn and soiled, his face scratched and bleeding, amid the hooting of the populace and the jeers of his enemies.

De Thou, his friend, was arrested on the same day, not as guilty of conspiring, but simply as being cognizant of the existence of the treaty of Madrid, which Fontrailles had carefully carried off into the Netherlands stitched in his clothes, a copy of which lay with the Cardinal.

Monsieur Duc d'Orléans was also, for the fourth time, arrested and imprisoned.

The effect of that copy of the treaty which Chavigny had shown to the King, while Cinq-Mars read his story, was instantaneous. Louis became greatly alarmed. He understood that Richelieu knew all, and therefore must be fully aware that he had himself encouraged and approved a plot to kill him. The same day that Cinq-Mars was conducted a prisoner to the Castle of Montpellier, Louis insisted upon going himself to Tarascon, to make a personal apology to Richelieu. He was already so weakened by the disease of which he died, that he was forced to be carried in a chair

into the Cardinal's lodgings. They were together many hours. What passed no one knew, but it is certain that the "*amiable criminal*," as Cinq-Mars is called by contemporary authors, was the scapegoat sacrificed to the offended dignity of the Cardinal; that Monsieur, the King's only brother, was to be tried for treason; and that Richelieu should be restored to the King's confidence. In his eagerness to propitiate his offended minister, Louis actually proposed to take his two sons from the custody of the Queen and place them with the Cardinal, in order to guarantee his personal safety. This abject proposition was declined by Richelieu, who was unwilling to provoke the Queen's active hostility at so critical a moment.

Richelieu had conquered, but he was dying. Though his body was broken by disease, his mind was vigorous as ever; in revenge and hatred, in courage and fortitude, his spirit was still lusty. In his enormous thirst of blood, none had ever excited him like the airy Marquis de Cinq-Mars,—a creature of his own, whom he had raised to the dizzy height of supreme power, to become his rival in love and in power. The great minister felt he had made a mistake: it angered him. He had not patience to think that he should have been taken

in by a butterfly, whose painted wings he had decorated with his own hands. He, the all-potent Cardinal, the ruler of France, circumvented by a boy! He swore a big oath that not only should Cinq-Mars die, but that death should be made doubly bitter to him.

Richelieu was now at Valence on the Rhone. How was he to reach Lyons, where the trial was to take place? The distance is considerable. His limbs were cramped and useless, his body racked by horrible pain. But go he would; if he died upon the road he would go. So he ordered a room of wooden planks to be constructed, gilt and painted like a coach, and lined with crimson damask. This room contained a bed, a table, and a chair. Within reclined the Cardinal. Too ill to bear the motion of a carriage, he was borne on the heads of twenty of his body-guard by land. Houses, walls, and gateways, were knocked down to make way for him. By water he was conveyed in a towing boat pulled up the Rhone against the current by horses to Lyons. Attached to this boat was another, in which the prisoners Cinq-Mars and De Thou were carried. So Richelieu passed onwards, with all the pomp of a Roman pro-consul conducting barbarian princes first to

adorn his triumph, then to die! As for Monsieur, he had already made his peace with his brother and Richelieu. He turned King's evidence, and betrayed everybody. Fontrailles, who alone could have convicted him, was safe across the frontier. "Talk not to me of my brother," even the besotted Louis exclaimed, when he heard that Monsieur was again at liberty; "Gaston ever was, and ever will be, a traitor."

The only crime which even the ingenuity of Richelieu could prove against Cinq-Mars was that he had joined with Monsieur in a treaty with Spain. Now the original transcript of this treaty was lost, Fontrailles having carried it with him into the Netherlands, stitched in his pocket. If Monsieur the Duc d'Orléans, therefore, had declined to speak, Cinq-Mars and his friend De Thou must have been acquitted. But Monsieur, on the contrary, loudly demanded to be interrogated on his own complicity and on the complicity of Cinq-Mars. The Cardinal had already showed what was in his mind, by giving orders, as soon as he was lifted out of his portable chamber, on arriving at Lyons, and before the trial had begun, "for the executioner to hold himself in readiness."

The trial was on the 12th of September, 1642.

It began at seven o'clock in the morning, at the Hôtel de Ville. The Chancellor Séguier, a personal enemy of Monsieur le Grand, who had affronted him in the days of his greatness, was the president, and Monsieur Duc d'Orléans the principal witness. Monsieur's evidence was given with touching candour. He was so careful to tell all the truth, so skilful in bringing out all those facts which were calculated to place Cinq-Mars in the most odious light, that the charges were easily proved to the satisfaction of the judges. The trial was over in a few hours. Then the two young men were summoned before the judges in the council chamber to hear their sentence, which was read out to them by Monsieur de Palleruc, a member of the criminal court of Lyons. According to this sentence they were both to be beheaded; Cinq-Mars was to be tortured. He listened with calmness, De Thou with resignation. They both shook hands with their judges. "I am prepared to die," said Cinq-Mars to Séguier, the Chancellor, "but I must say the idea of torture is horrible and degrading. It is a most extraordinary sentence for a man of my rank and of my age. I thought the laws did not permit it. Indeed, I do not fear death, gentlemen," continued the poor lad,

turning to the judges, "but I confess my weakness,—I dread torture. At least, I beseech you, let me have a confessor."

His request was complied with, and Father Malavette, a Jesuit, was brought into the council-chamber. As soon as he saw him Cinq-Mars ran forward and embraced him. "My father, they are going to torture me," he said; "I can scarcely bring myself to bear it! What is your opinion?"

"That you must submit to the hand of God, Monseigneur. Nothing happens but by his permission."

Cinq-Mars bowed his handsome head, covered with the sunny curls, and was silent. From the council-chamber he was led by Monsieur de Lanbardemont, an officer of the court, to the torture-room. Here he remained about half an hour, and suffered torture, both ordinary and extraordinary. His supple limbs and delicate skin were horribly lacerated. He was unable to walk when he came out, and was supported by the officials. "Let me now think of my soul," he said faintly; "send my confessor to me, and permit me to be alone with him." This wish was granted, and an hour passed, during which he confessed and received absolution. Then he said to Father Malavette, "I have not eaten for twenty-four hours, my

father, and I am very weak. I fear if I do not take something I may swoon upon the scaffold, though indeed, I assure you, I do not fear to die." A little wine and bread were brought to him, of which he partook. "Ah! my father," said the poor boy of twenty-two, "what a world it is! Everybody I know has forsaken me. How strange it is! I thought I had many friends, but I see no one cares for me now but poor De Thou, whom I alone have brought to this pass."

"Alas! my son, you are young, or you would not wonder at this," answered Father Malavette sorrowfully; "'put not your faith in princes.' What says Ovid too, who, like you, enjoyed the favour of Augustus, and was then cruelly punished?

"'Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos.'"

"But, my father, when I was the favourite of his Majesty, I tried to serve my friends in every way I possibly could, yet now I am alone."

"No matter," said the priest, shaking his head, "your service to them only made them your enemies."

"Alack, I fear it is so," replied Cinq-Mars, sighing deeply. Then he asked for paper, and wrote to his mother. He prayed her to pay all his

debts, and again expressed his utter astonishment at the conduct of his friends. At three o'clock in the afternoon both he and De Thou were carried in a hired coach into the Place des Terraux, lying over against the banks of the river Soane, in the outskirts of the city. Here the scaffold was erected. Every house in the Place was covered by temporary balustrades and balconies; the roofs also were crowded with spectators. Thousands had come together to see the favourite die.

Cinq-Mars with difficulty mounted the ladder leading to the scaffold, with the help of Father Malavette. Then, still holding him by the hand to steady his wounded limbs, he raised his plumed hat from off his head, and, with a graceful air, saluted the multitude. He turned to every side, and passed round to each face of the platform, that all might see him and receive his salutation. He wore a court suit of fine Holland broad cloth, trimmed with gold lace; his black hat ornamented with red feathers was turned back in the Spanish style. He had high-heeled shoes with diamond buckles, and green silk stockings, and carried a large scarlet mantle, to cover his body after decapitation, neatly folded on one arm. His fair young face was perfectly serene, and his clustering curls, slightly powdered, were scented

and tended as carefully as heretofore. Having bowed to the crowd, he replaced his hat on his head, and, with his hand resting on his right side, he now turned round to look about him. Behind were two blocks, covered with red cloth. Beside them stood the executioner. He was only a city porter—the regular official being ill—a coarse and brutal fellow, with a bloated face, wearing the dress of a labourer. When he came up to Cinq-Mars with scissors to cut off his hair, M. le Grand put him away with a motion of disgust. He begged Father Malavette to do him this office, and to keep his hair for his mother. While the long ringlets which fell over his shoulders were being cut off, Cinq-Mars turned towards the executioner, who had not yet taken the axe out of a dirty bag which lay beside him, and asked him haughtily, "What he was about?" and "Why he did not begin?" The rude fellow making a wry face in reply, Cinq-Mars left him, and addressed himself to Father Malavette. "My father," said he, "assist me in my prayers, then I shall be ready."

After he had prayed very devoutly, and kissed the crucifix repeatedly, he rose from his knees, and again in a firm voice repeated, "I am ready, begin!" Then he added, "My God have mercy upon

me, and pardon my sins." He threw away his hat, unloosed the lace ruff from about his throat, put back his hair from his face, and laid his head on the block. Several blows descended ere his head was severed from the body; the executioner being unready and new to his office. When the head fell it gave a bound, turned itself a little on one side, and the lips palpitated visibly, the eyes being wide open. The body was covered with the scarlet mantle borne by Cinq-Mars on his arm for that purpose, and carried away to be buried.

The King, informed by the Cardinal of the precise day and hour when Cinq-Mars would suffer death,—for every detail had been virtually arranged before Richelieu left Valence in his wooden chamber,—took out his watch at the appointed time, and, with the most perfect unconcern, remarked to Chavigny, "At this moment Monsieur le Grand is making an ugly face at Lyons."

Then Richelieu ordered that the feudal castle of Cinq-Mars, in the valley of the Loire, should be blown up, and the towers razed "*to the height of infamy.*"

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE END OF THE CARDINAL.

WHEN the Louvre was a walled and turreted stronghold, with moat and drawbridge, bastion and tower, lying on grassy banks beside the river Seine, then unbordered by quays and untraversed by stone bridges, an ancient castle, strongly fortified, stood in the open country, hard by, without the city walls. In the time of Charles VI., the mad king, husband of the notorious Isabeau de Bavière, this castle belonged to Bernard Comte d'Armagnac, Constable of France, the ally of the English against his own sovereign, and a leader in those terrible civil wars that desolated France throughout the space of two reigns. Hither the English and the Burgundians often repaired, to meditate some murderous *coup de main* upon the capital, to mass their bloodthirsty troops for secret expeditions, or to seek a safe retreat when the fortune of war was adverse. As time went by this castle grew grey with age; the rebel nobles

to whom it belonged were laid in their graves, and no one cared to inhabit a gloomy fortress, torn and battered by war and sacked by marauders. The wind howled through the desolate chambers, owls hooted from the rents in its turrets, and noisome reptiles crawled in the rank weeds which choked up its courts. It came to be a gruesome place, lying among barren fields, where the ruffians and desperadoes of the city resorted to plan a murder or to hide from justice. This God-forgotten ruin and the foot-trodden fields about it came to be purchased at last by wealthy nobles, who loved the fresh country breezes in the new streets which now arose on this side of the river. The materials of the old castle served to furnish walls for the palaces of the Rambouillets and the Mercœurs, historic names in every age of the national annals. Here they kept their state, until Cardinal Richelieu, either by fair means or foul, it mattered little to him, bought and destroyed their spacious mansions, pulled down all that remained of the castle walls, filled up the ditches, levelled the earth, and, on the ill-omened spot, raised the sumptuous pile known as the Palais Cardinal, near, yet removed from, the residence of the sovereign at the Louvre. The principal buildings

ran round an immense central square, or court-yard, planted symmetrically with trees and adorned with fountains and statues. From this central square four other smaller courts opened out towards each point of the compass. There was a chapel splendidly decorated, and, to balance that, two theatres, one sufficiently spacious to hold three thousand spectators, painted on panel by Philippe de Champagne. There were ball-rooms furnished with a luxury unknown before; boudoirs—or rather bowers—miracles of taste and elegance; galleries filled with pictures and works of art, and countless suites of rooms, in which every decoration and adornment then practised were displayed. Over the grand entrance in the Rue Saint-Honoré appeared, carved in marble, the arms of Richelieu, surmounted by a cardinal's hat and the inscription "Palais Cardinal." Spacious gardens extended at the rear.

Still the Cardinal, like Wolsey at Hampton Court, added wall to wall of the already overgrown palace, and bought up street after street within the city to extend the gardens, until even the subservient Louis showed some tokens of displeasure. Then, and not till then, did the Cardinal cease building. At his death he presented his

palace to the sovereign; and from that day to this the Palais Cardinal, now Palais Royal, has become an appanage of the State.

Before us stands the Palais Cardinal—solitary, in the midst of lonely gardens, sheltered by waving groves. The greensward is divided by straight walks, bordered by clipped lime-trees, rounded at intervals into niches for statues and trophies; balustraded terraces border deep canals, and fountains bubble up under formal groups of yew or cypress. The palace casts deep shadows on the grass. It is very still. High walls encircle the enclosure. The very birds are mute. Not the bay of a hound is heard. Moss gathers on the paths and among the tangled shrubberies, and no flowers catch the radiance of the sunshine. Within is the great, the terrible Cardinal. The ground is sacred to the despot of France, the ruler of the monarch, the glance of whose eye is death or fortune. Journeying direct from Lyons in his chamber on wheels—after the execution of Cinq-Mars—to Fontainebleau, where he rested, he is come here to die. Yonder he lies on a bed of state, hung with embroidered velvet in a painted chamber, the walls covered with rare pictures and choicest tapestry, the windows looking towards

the garden. The moment approaches when he will have to answer for his merciless exercise of absolute power over king and people, to that Heavenly Master whose priest and servant he professes to be. How will he justify his bitter hatred, his arrogant oppression of the great princes and nobles of France? How will he meet the avenging ghosts of the chivalrous Montmorenci, the poetic Chalais, the gallant Cinq-Mars, the witty Saint-Preuil, the enthusiastic Urbain Grandier, in the unknown country whither he is fast hastening? Who tried to seduce, then to ruin, the Queen, Anne of Austria, and send her back, divorced and disgraced, into Spain? Who turned the feeble Louis into a servile agent of his ambition, and exercised over his weak mind a tyranny as shameful to himself as degrading to the sovereign? True, Richelieu may plead reasons of State, a rebellious nobility, traitorous princes, and an imbecile king; but the isolation of the throne, begun under his rule, was both barbarous and impolitic, as after ages showed. True he possessed rare genius, and his life was industriously devoted to what he called "*the glory of France;*" but it was a mean and selfish glory, to attain which he had waded through the noblest blood of the land.

Look at him now—he has just received extreme unction. A hypocrite to the last, he folds his hands on his breast and exclaims—"This is my God; as in his visible presence, I declare I have sacrificed myself to France." When he is asked by the officiating priest—"If he forgives his enemies?"—he replies, "I have no enemies but those of the State." Now the hand of death is visibly upon him. In a loose robe of purple silk, he lies supported by pillows of fine lace. He is hardly recognisable, so great have been his sufferings, so complete is his weakness; his bloodless lips pant for breath, his hollow eyes wander on vacancy, his thin fingers work convulsively on the sheets, as though striving against the approach of invisible foes.

But, before he departs, a signal honour is reserved for him. Behold, the rich velvet curtains, heavy with golden embroideries, are held aside by pages who carry plumed hats in their hands, and Louis XIII. enters hastily. He is bareheaded, and is accompanied by the princes of the blood and the great ministers of State. Louis is so shrunken and attenuated, so white and large-eyed, that in any other presence he might have been deemed a dying man himself. As he advances to

the *ruelle* that encloses the bed, he composes his thin lips and pinched face into a decent expression of condolence. How can he but *affect* to deplore the death of a minister whose fierce passions overshadowed his whole life like a moral upas-tree? Nevertheless the fitting phrases are spoken, and he embraces the ghastly form stretched out before him with a semblance of affection. The expiring Cardinal presses the hand of his master, and makes a sign that he would speak. Louis bows down his head to catch the feeble voice, which says—"Sire, I thank you for this honour; I have spent my whole life in your service. I leave you able ministers; trust them, Sire; but,—" and he stops and struggles fearfully for breath,—"but, beware of your Court. It is your *petit coucher* who are dangerous. Your favourites have troubled me more than all your enemies." Then the Cardinal sinks back fainting on his pillows.

Louis withdraws with affected concern; but, ere he reaches the spacious ante-room, lined with the Cardinal's retainers in magnificent liveries, he bursts into an inhuman laugh—"There goes a great politician to his death," he says to Chavigny, who is beside him, and he points with his thumb towards the Cardinal's chamber; "a wonderful

genius. Now he is gone I shall be free—I shall reign for myself." He chuckles with delight at the idea of being at last rid of the Cardinal; and a grim smile spreads itself over his ashen face..

It is a ghastly joke, as cruel as it is selfish. As if Louis's life were bound up in the existence of his great minister—he is himself a corpse within a year!

CHAPTER XLV.

THE QUEEN-REGENT.

Louis XIV. was four years and a half old when his father died at Saint-Germain, aged forty-two. Tardy in everything, Louis XIII. was six weeks in dying. The state christening of his son was celebrated during his illness. When asked his name, the little lad replied, "I am Louis XIV."

"Not yet, my son, not yet," murmured the dying King, "but shortly, if so it please God."

Anne of Austria, named Regent by her husband's will, rules in her son's name. A splendid Court assembles round her, at the Louvre, at Saint-Germain, and at Fontainebleau. Her exiled favourites are there to do her homage. The Duchesse de Chevreuse, after a long sojourn in Spain, England, and Flanders,—for she loves travel and the adventures of the road, either masked, or disguised as a page, a priest, or a cavalier,—is reinstated in her Majesty's favour. In Spain the Duchess's vanity

was gratified by enslaving a royal lover—the King of Spain, brother of Anne of Austria; in England she diverted herself with fomenting personal quarrels between Charles I. and Henrietta Maria; in Flanders—a dull country—she found little to amuse her.

Mademoiselle de Hautefort (soon to become Duchesse and Maréchale de Schomberg) returns in obedience to the Queen's command, who wrote to her even while the King was alive, "Come, dearest friend, come quickly. I am all impatience to embrace you!"

The Duchesse de Sennécy arrives from the provinces, and the Chevalier de Jars from England. The latter had been imprisoned in the Bastille, and threatened with torture by Richelieu, to force him to betray the Queen's correspondence with Spain at the time of the Val de Grâce conspiracy. He had been liberated, however, but while the Cardinal lived had remained in England.

These, among many other faithful attendants, resume their places at the *petit coucher*, in the *grand cercle*, and at the morning *lever*.

Then there are the princes and princesses of the blood-royal:—Monsieur the Duc d'Orléans—no longer breathing vows of love in the moonlight,

[illegible] on the road to [illegible] together [illegible] *Mademoiselle*, a [illegible] Europe; Cæsar, [illegible] and Henry IV., [illegible] the Dues de [illegible] the uncrowned [illegible]—more ill- [illegible]—his jealous [illegible] hazards of the [illegible] Charlotte de [illegible] a dignified matron, [illegible] d'Enghien, [illegible] Duchesse de Longueville, [illegible] the Duc de [illegible] the Prince de Marsillac to become [illegible] the last-named Duchess, [illegible] the great House of La Tour d'Auvergne, Vicomte de Turenne and Duc de Bouillon, from which springs Henri de Duc d'Aumale, grandson of young Condé; Séguier, Duc de Villemor, generously forgiven for the part he took against the Queen as Chancellor, at the Val de Grâce, and last of all, Henry, Duc de Guise—by and by to astonish Europe by his daring esca-

pade at Naples, where, but for Masaniello, he might have been crowned King, with the Queen's beautiful maid of honour, Mademoiselle de Pons, at his side.

There is also about the Court a young man named Giulio Mazarin, born in Rome of a Sicilian family, late secretary to Cardinal Richelieu. He has passed many years in Spain, and can converse fluently in that language with her Majesty whenever she deigns to address him. He has a pale, inexpressive face, with large black eyes, *à fleur de tête*, generally bent on the ground. His manners are modest, though insinuating; his address is gentle, his voice musical. Like all Italians, he is artistic; a *conoscente* in music, a collector of pictures, china, and antiquities. So unobtrusive and accomplished a gentleman cannot fail to please, especially as he is only in deacon's orders, and, with a dispense, free to marry. The Queen, who often converses with him in her native tongue, appreciates his merits. Her minister, the Bishop of Beauvais, leaves the Court. He finds that his presence is useless, as the Queen acts entirely under the advice of this young Italian, whom she also selects as guardian to the young King, who, poor simple boy, looks on Mazarin as a father.

The Regency begins auspiciously. Fifteen days

the Archbishop of Paris. No greater contrast can be conceived than between the subtle, shuffling Italian, patient as he is false, and Gondi, bold, liberal, independent, generous even to his enemies, incapable of envy or deceit, grasping each turn of fortune with the ready adaptiveness of genius, and swaying the passions of men by his fiery eloquence; a daring statesman, a resolute reformer, one of whom Cromwell had said—"that he, De Retz, was the only man in Europe who despised him."

Gondi considered himself sacrificed to the Church —for which he had no vocation—and did his utmost, by the libertinism of his early life, to render his ordination impossible; but in vain. Although he had abducted his own cousin, and been the hero of numberless scandals, the Archbishopric of Paris was considered a sinecure in the family of Gondi, and Archbishop and Cardinal he must be in spite of his inclination and of his excesses. In politics he was a republican, formed on the pattern of Cato and of Brutus, whose lives he had studied at the Sorbonne. He loved to be compared to Cicero and to Cataline, and to believe himself called on to revolutionize France after the fashion of a factious conspirator of old Rome. He longed to be anything belligerent, agitative—tribune, general, or demagogue. "Ancient

Rome," he said, "honoured crime, therefore crime was to be honoured." "Rather let me be the leader of a great party than an emperor!" exclaimed he, in the climax of one of his thrilling perorations. The mild precepts of the gospel were clearly little to his taste. He had mistaken not only his vocation but his century. He should have lived in the Middle Ages; and as an ecclesiastical prince-militant led armies into battle, conquered territories, and made laws to subject peoples. Yet underlying the wild enthusiasm of his language, and the reckless energy of his actions, there was a kindly, almost gentle temper that imparted to his character a certain incompleteness which accounts for the falling off of his later years. Grand, noble as was De Retz, Mazarin ultimately beat him and remained master of the situation.

Under the guidance of Gondi (De Retz) the parliament, paralyzed for a time, soon learns its power, and gives unmistakable tokens of insubordination by opposing every edict and tax proposed by the Government. Some of the most fractious of "these impertinent bourgeois," as Condé called them, were arrested and exhibited in chains—like captives in a Roman triumph—at Notre-Dame on the occasion of a second *Te Deum* sung for a second great victory

gained by young Condé. Mazarin, by this act, overtaxed the endurance of the citizens. In one night two hundred barricades rise in the streets of Paris. The Queen-Regent can see them from her windows. This ebullition of popular fury appears to Gondi as the realisation of his youthful dreams. The moment has come to make him a tribune of the people. He has loyally warned the Regent of the impending peril. The Queen considered his words mere bravado, and treated him personally with suspicion and contempt. Gondi was warned that Mazarin had decided on his exile. His generous nature was outraged: "To-morrow," he said, "before noon, I will be master of Paris." Noon did see him master of Paris; but, loose as was his estimate of the sacredness of his office, he was still Archbishop-Coadjutor; he could not personally lead the rabble, or publicly instigate the citizens to rebellion. A man of straw must represent him, and do what he dared not—harangue at the crosses and corners of the streets, head the popular assemblies, and generally excite the passions of the turbulent Parisians to fever heat. This man of straw was found in the Duc de Beaufort, grandson of Henri Quatre, through Gabrielle d'Estrées,—a dandy, a swaggerer, but a warrior.

Now the Duc de Beaufort, hot-headed and giddy, without either judgment or principles, cares little for either Cardinal, Coadjutor, or Queen,—is utterly indifferent as to who may rule or who may serve, provided always his own claims, as prince of the blood, to the most lucrative posts are admitted. But he does care very much for an affront offered to the Duchesse de Montbazon, of whom he is desperately enamoured. The Duchesse de Montbazon, step-mother of the Duchesse de Chevreuse, and lady in waiting to the Queen, finds late one evening, on returning to her hôtel, two love-letters dropped on the floor of her private closet. One is from a gentleman, the other from a lady; both are unsigned. She of course at once decides that the handwriting of the one is that of the lady she most hates, that of the other, the lover of that same lady, whom she hates even more, if possible, than the lady herself. Now the lady whom she hates most is the Duchesse de Longueville, younger, more attractive, and more powerful than herself. The gentleman she selects is the Count de Coligni, who had deserted her for the sake of the Duchess. The next morning, at the Queen's lever, Madame de Montbazon shows these two love-letters to every one, and being the mistress of a caustic tongue, makes some

diverting remarks on their contents. Her words are repeated to the Duchesse de Longueville; she denies the fact altogether. Her mother, the Princesse de Condé, Charlotte de Montmorenci, broadly hints to Anne of Austria that the Prince de Condé, the greatest general France had ever possessed since the days of the Constable de Bourbon, will join the malcontent parliament, nay, may even lead Spain into France, if her Majesty does not instantly cause the Duchesse de Montbazon to retract all she has said of his sister. Such is patriotism under the Regency! The Queen, overwhelmed by the clamour of the two duchesses, invokes the help of Cardinal Mazarin. The Cardinal, in his Italian-French, soothes and persuades both, muttering many classic oaths of *Cospetto* and *Corpo di Bacco* under his breath. He goes to and fro between the ladies, flatters both, and proposes terms of apology. Every suggestion is objected to; an hour is spent over each word. Such a negotiation is far more difficult than the government of France. All conclusion seeming impossible, the Queen at last speaks with authority. She says that "if Madame de Montbazon will not retract she shall lose her place at Court."

So Spain is not at this time to invade France

under the command of Condé, and the Duchesse de Longueville is to receive an apology.

The apology is to be made at the Hôtel de Condé. The Duchesse de Longueville—a superb blonde, with melting blue eyes, golden brown hair, transparent complexion, and a dazzling neck and shoulders, a coronet of orient pearls and a red feather on her head, a chaplet of the same jewels clasping her throat, wearing a robe of blue tissue, bordered and worked with pearls —stands in the great saloon of her father's ancestral palace. Her feet rest on a dais of cloth of gold and silver; it is covered by a canopy spangled with stars. The walls of the saloon are covered with bright frescoes of birds, fruit, and flowers, panelled into golden frames. Four great chandeliers of crystal and silver are placed on pedestals at each corner of the room, lighting up a glittering crowd of princes and princesses of the blood who stand beside the Duchess on the estrade. The greatest nobles of France are present. The doors are flung open, and the Duchesse de Montbazon, a dainty brunette, brilliant, audacious, enticing, who, although forty, is still in the zenith of her charms, flashes into the room in full court costume, her sacque (or train) of amber satin

brocaded with gold reaching many yards behind her. The colour on her cheeks is heightened either by rouge or passion; her eyes glitter, and her whole bearing is of one who would say, "I *must* do this, but I defy you." She knows that all the gentlemen take part with her, if the ladies side with her enemy. She walks straight up to the dais on which the Duchesse de Longueville, *née* Princesse de Condé, stands, stops, looks her full in the face, then leisurely and with the utmost unconcern casts her eyes round on the company, smiles sweetly to the Duc de Beaufort, and bows to those princes and nobles who are her champions, particularly to the Ducs d'Orléans and De Guise. Then she unfolds her painted fan, and reads what follows from a slip of pink paper attached to one of the jewelled sticks.

"Madame, I come here to assure your highness that I am quite innocent of any intention of injuring you. Had it not been so I would not only humbly beg your pardon, but I would willingly endure any punishment her Majesty might see fit to impose on me. I entreat you therefore to believe that I have never failed in the esteem which your virtues command, or in the respect due to your high rank."

The Duchesse de Longueville's soft blue eyes, usually incapable of any other expression but tenderness or supplication, look absolutely wicked, so defiant is the bearing of Madame de Montbazon. She advances to the edge of the estrade, draws herself up with an imperious air, and casting a haughty glance at her rival, who, crimson in the face, is fanning herself violently and ogling the Duc de Beaufort, reading also from her fan, pronounces the following words, dictated by Cardinal Mazarin:—

"Madame, I am willing to believe that you took no part in the calumny which has been circulated to my prejudice. I make this acknowledgment in deference to the commands of the Queen."

Thus ends the quarrel; but not the consequences. The whole Court and city is in an uproar. The citizens are deeply interested, and to a man take part with the *chère amie* of Beaufort against the Duchesse de Longueville, and against Condé and Mazarin.

Condé is not sure if he will not after all lead the Spaniards against France. The Duchesse de Montbazon feeds the flame for her private ends. She lays all the blame of her humiliation on Cardinal Mazarin, which exasperates Beaufort to

madness; and she incites Henri, Duc de Guise, another of her adorers—the wildest, bravest, and most dissolute of princes—to challenge the Comte de Coligni, whom she had designated as the writer of one of the love letters. A duel is fought in the Place Royale. The Duchesse de Montbazon watches the while out of a window of the palace of the Duc de Rohan, her cousin. Coligni is killed. He falls, it is said, into the arms of the Duchesse de Longueville, who is present on the Place, disguised as a page.

The Duc de Beaufort, whose turbulent folly foreshadows the *grand seigneur* of later reigns and almost excuses the great Revolution, refuses to receive a royal herald, sent to him by the Queen, turns his back upon her Majesty at her lever, and threatens the life of the Cardinal. The Duchesse de Montbazon is banished.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE DUC DE BEAUFORT.

THE Duc de Beaufort is summoned to a private audience at the Louvre. On his way up the grand staircase entering from the inner quadrangle he meets his mother, the Duchesse de Vendôme, and his sister, the Duchesse de Nemours, who, their attendance on the Queen over, are descending.

"Good God! Francis," cries his mother, raising her hands with a gesture of horror, "I thought you were safe at Rambouillet. *You* within the Louvre at this moment? You must be mad!" And she throws herself upon him and tries to bar his further passage.

"Oh, my brother!" exclaims his sister Nemours, in the same breath, throwing her arms around his neck; "in the name of the Holy Virgin, do not tempt your fate. Fly, dear Francis—fly, while you can—our coach is waiting below—come with us instantly." And Madame de Nemours

takes him by the arm, and tries to draw him downwards.

Beaufort plants himself firmly on the stair. His first impulse is to push them both forcibly aside, and to proceed; his next to curse their folly in the spicy *argot* of the *halles*. He does neither; but stands open-mouthed, his fierce eyes demanding an explanation he does not condescend to ask. The explanation is soon forthcoming.

"My son," cries his mother, bursting into tears, and seizing on his hand to detain him, as he makes a motion as if to leave them, "listen to me, I implore you. Your sister and I have been in waiting on the Queen many hours to-day. She is terribly incensed against you. People have been coming all day with tales to her here, at the Louvre. Crowds have filled her audience chamber."

"*Mille Diables!* What do you mean, mother?" bursts out Beaufort, shaking himself free from both ladies. "You call me mad, if any one be mad it is yourselves. I am here, summoned by the Queen herself, to a private audience. *Ventre de ma vie!*" —Beaufort much affects some of the favourite oaths of his grandfather, Henri Quatre—"what are her Majesty's humours to me?"

"Oh, Francis," sobs the Duchesse de Nemours,

"what have you done? You have threatened the life of Cardinal Mazarin. The Queen knows it. She has sent for you to secure your person. She can have no other motive. Nothing can exceed her indignation. She said, in my hearing, that you had personally insulted her; that your party, the *Importants*, was the curse of her reign; and that the Duchesse de Montbazon corrupted the princes of the blood by her intrigues. In the name of heaven, do not venture near her Majesty if you value your liberty, or even your life!"

The Duchesse de Vendôme wrings her hands while her daughter is speaking.

"For my sake, quit Paris, my dear son. If you remain, not even Gondi can save you. Come with us instantly, and cross the frontier while you can."

Her words are broken; she trembles at her son's manifest danger; Beaufort looks at her, shakes his head, and bursts into a loud laugh.

"You are a couple of lunatics, both of you"—and again he laughs—"I shall not leave Paris; I will not even hide myself. Calm yourself, mother"—and he kisses her on the cheek—"her Majesty has summoned me to a private audience. I shall obey her. She is no traitress. I have been guilty of rudeness towards her. I go to wipe out the

remembrance of it. I am rough, but not brutal, specially to the Queen. Besides, *they dare not arrest me.*" [1]

Saying which, he pushes his mother and sister, who still endeavour to stop him, on one side, and bounds up the stairs.

It is evening. Anne of Austria is alone in a spacious withdrawing room, from which her private writing-closet opens. Four lofty windows turn towards the river—one is open. She sits beside it, gazing at the dazzling tints of the summer sunset that lace the western heavens with bars of fire. In front rise the double towers of Notre-Dame. The fretted spire of the Sainte-Chapelle glistens against a bank of heavy clouds that are rapidly welling up from the south. These clouds deepen with the twilight. The lustre of a stormy sunset soon fades out. The sun disappears, and darker and denser clouds gather and thicken, and obscure the light. Low thunder rumbles in the distance, and a few heavy raindrops descend. Long shadows fall across the floor, the corners of the room grow dark, and only a few bright gleams, lingering low on the horizon, rest on the Queen's face and figure.

Anne of Austria has now passed into middle life;

[1] These words, spoken by the Duc de Beaufort, are the same as those of the Balafré, at Blois, before his assassination by Henry III.

her form is full, her movements heavy. The glorious eyes are still lustrous, but no longer flash with the fire of youth. Her hair, though still abundant, has lost its glossy brightness. Her dress is rich, her bearing cold and stately. She affects a distant, almost a haughty manner, and is severe in exacting the most rigid etiquette from all who approach her, save alone the Cardinal. He comes and goes as he lists, smiling and obsequious, but no longer humble or subservient as of yore. Indeed, at times he treats her Majesty with absolute familiarity, to the utter dismay of the Duchesse de Chevreuse and Mademoiselle de Hautefort. When not engaged with Mazarin in state affairs, or in giving audiences, the Queen passes her time in her oratory. Not only is she devout herself, but exacts at all events the same outward show of piety from her ladies.

Twilight has deepened into gloom, ere the Duc de Beaufort enters. He stands in shadow, and as he glances at the Queen, he inwardly apostrophises his mother and sister as a couple of fools and gossips, for imagining him to be in any danger of her displeasure. His boisterous bearing—for he affects the manners of the lowest of the populace, the better to sway them, and by so doing to

embarrass the minister—is visibly softened. He remembers with pain the insults of which he has been guilty in turning his back on the Queen, when they last met, and in refusing to receive her herald. He is both repentant and flattered at her summons. His obeisance to her is unusually low, and some tokens of emotion betray themselves on his dissipated though handsome countenance.

"Good evening, cousin," says Anne of Austria, as he enters, a gracious smile upon her face, and with that queenly grace natural to her, she presents her still beautiful hand to him, which he kisses kneeling. "Where have you been these four days past? You are a stranger at the Louvre."

Her voice is sweet, her look is gentle. It is impossible that what Beaufort has heard can be true.

"Madame," he answers, bowing, "had I not been absent from Paris, I should not have failed to present my duty to your Majesty. But I am only just returned from a hunting-party at Rambouillet, whither I went with my brother-in-law, Nemours. Until I came back I did not know that you had asked for me. What can I do for your Majesty's service? I am always at your command."

"Ah, cousin, you are always at my command, I know," answers the Queen, repeating his words,

and she laughs slightly. Beaufort winces at the covert rebuke. He feels that her meaning must be ironical, yet she speaks caressingly, and the same gracious smile still plays about her mouth.

"You once called me the most honourable man in France, Madame; I am proud to remember it." Beaufort speaks roughly, and in a loud voice; the momentary polish is passing away with the momentary emotion. "I am what I ever was. I do not change. I wish I could say the same of your Majesty. Madame, you have greatly altered," and he looks at her straight in the face. Anne of Austria shifts her position, so as to sit in shadow, then she replies:—

"I have no *special* purpose in summoning you, cousin, save for the satisfaction your presence here gives me." Again Beaufort feels the covert stab, and observes that she studiously avoids noticing his remarks on her altered conduct towards him.

"You and I," adds the Queen, in a voice strangely monotonous, "are indeed old friends and comrades as well as cousins."

"You have not a truer friend in all France than I am," answers the Duke vehemently, and he advances a step or two towards the window, near which the Queen sits, raises his hand to emphasise

his words, and lets it fall so heavily on a table near as to make the whole room echo. The Queen still smiles graciously.

"Yes, Madame, I am no courtier; I hate Courts; but before you made that Italian *facchino* your favourite you relied on Beaufort." As he pronounces the Cardinal's name his face hardens and his hands clench themselves; an almost imperceptible shudder passes over the Queen. Then he continues:—

"Was it not to Beaufort that you entrusted the sacred person of his Majesty and your own safety after the death of your husband, before the Regency was settled?"

Anne of Austria bows her head in silence. She is evidently determined not to take offence. If any one else had dared to mention the Cardinal to her in such language she would have ordered him to the Bastille.

Had the Duke been less giddy this knowledge ought to have curbed him, especially after the warning he had received; but his thoughts are now passing into a different channel, and he heeds it not.

"Yes, cousin, I have known you long, and closely," is the Queen's cautious rejoinder. "You

have been at Rambouillet, Prince," she continues; "have you had good sport? The canals there are, I am told, full of fat carp. Do you love fishing?"

The Duke stares at her without replying. The Queen, who appears to desire to continue the conversation, yet to avoid all discussion, still speaks—

"My son will grow up to be a keen sportsman, I hope. The royal forests must be better guarded. Did you and the Duc de Nemours find any deer at Rambouillet?"

Spite of the Queen's unusual loquacity, there is something in her manner which irritates the excitable Duke. He cannot altogether convince himself that she is not mocking him. He had come certainly repentant, but his fiery temper now overmasters him at the bare suspicion.

"Did your Majesty send for me to put such questions as these?" cries he roughly. "If so, I would rather have stayed at Rambouillet."

"Truly, Duke," replies the Queen evasively, colouring at his bluntness, "it is difficult to content you. I have already said that I summoned you for no special purpose, save that we might converse together"—and she stops suddenly, and hesitates—"as cousins, and *as friends*."

This last word is spoken slowly and with manifest effort. Her voice, which has a strange ring in it, is drowned by a clap of thunder, still distant, and a flash of lightning illuminates the room for an instant, and rests upon the long fair hair and frowning countenance of Beaufort. Her words are bland, but her bearing is distant and constrained. Even the unobservant Beaufort is struck by this anomaly; but he attributes it to some vestige of displeasure at his late conduct.

"I trust, Madame, you will always treat me with the confidence proper to both these titles," he replies stiffly.

Her words appease, but do not satisfy him. Even while speaking, the Queen has turned her head towards the door of her writing-closet, and listens. The wind roars without, and the waters of the Seine dash themselves against the low walls that border the Quay, but no sound within is audible. Anne of Austria resumes the conversation as though talking against time. But Beaufort, naturally unobservant, is now too much excited to notice this. He has forgotten all that his mother and sister had said. Not the slightest suspicion crosses his mind.

"It is a boisterous evening," continues the Queen,

looking out of the window—a faint flash of lightning plays round her darkly robed figure—"but the storm is still distant. By-the-bye, my cousin, am I to congratulate you on being appointed beadle of Saint-Nicholas des Champs?" asks the Queen, still smiling. "The bourgeoisie must be greatly flattered by your condescension."

"That is a matter of opinion," answers Beaufort. "I glory in belonging to the people. I would rather be called *Roi des Halles* than King of France."

The Queen says no more, again she listens. She seems more and more embarrassed, and the conversation languishes. The Duke begins to be conscious that something is amiss. He even goes the length of secretly wishing that the interview were over. A heaviness oppresses him; it is stiflingly hot, and the thunder sounds nearer. The image of his mother weeping bitterly rises up, unbidden, before him. Can there be any truth in her warning?

"Yes," continues Beaufort after an awkward pause, "Yes, I may be too much of a *Frondeur* to please you, Madame, and for my own safety also." Again the Queen turns her head, and listens anxiously. "A *Frondeur* against a government headed by an *alien*—not a *Frondeur* against

you, my cousin—never against *you*. To *you* I am ever loyal. You know this." His voice grows thick. He is much moved. "You, my cousin, can never forget my long exile after the death of Cinq-Mars at Lyons for your sake. Surely you cannot forget?"

Anne moves uneasily; she taps her small foot on the floor impatiently. Her eyes are bent outwards upon the approaching storm, which draws each instant nearer. The heavens are now like a wall of blackness, save where the lightning glitters for a moment. Yet she neither calls for lights, nor closes the window.

"Next to the Duchesse de Chevreuse," Beaufort continues, "Richelieu hated me, because I was devoted soul and body to you, and he knew it. Ah, my cousin, had the Duchess and I, your two friends, spoken, where would you have been now? Not on the throne, certainly. I carried your secret safely into England with me—I would have carried it to the grave—and you are Regent of France."

Whatever the Queen may feel, she carefully conceals it. A stony expression spreads itself over her face, and the smile on her lip becomes almost a grimace, her mouth is so tightly set.

"If I am grown rough and coarse," he con-

tinues, "like the rabble among whom I live—if I offend you by my frankness, remember Beaufort was faithful to you in adversity—most true and faithful."

The tears come into his eyes as he speaks; he brushes them off with his sleeve. The Queen is not at all moved by this appeal. A third time she turns her head as if listening for some expected sound—then, hearing nothing, her eyelids drop, and she plays with her fan.

"These are difficult times, my cousin," she says at last, speaking slowly. "Much depends on the princes of the blood. I reckon on you, Duke, as a firm pillar of the State," and she touches him with her fan.

Beaufort starts. "Would I were such a pillar!" he exclaims with warmth. "Take Gondi as your minister, my cousin. Send Mazarin back to the Roman gutter from whence he sprung. You would have no more trouble with the parliament. I warrant you they would obey you like lambs, my cousin. Banish Mazarin, and I will lead you and the young King in triumph throughout France. Not a *Frondeur* would be left in the land. If there were, I would shoot him with my own hand. Answer me, Madame; will you try?"

Beaufort stretches out his hand as he speaks to clasp that of the Queen. Anne neither stirs, neither looks up, nor touches his hand. To speak is evidently difficult to her. Surely she must be expecting some one, for she again turns her head towards the writing-closet and listens. A sharp clap of thunder rattles through the room; when it is past her eyes rest upon the Duke, who is eagerly awaiting her reply. The set smile is still on her lips; she is about to answer him, when a distinct sound of footsteps is heard within in her writing-closet. A page enters, and announces Cardinal Mazarin's arrival to consult her Majesty on urgent state business. Beaufort's face darkens. Ere the page has ceased speaking, the long-gathering storm bursts forth with fury. A tremendous peal of thunder shakes the palace, and big drops of rain are driven through the window. The Queen rises hastily and signs to the page to close the sash. She is evidently greatly relieved. "I regret this interruption, Prince," she says, speaking rapidly, "but it is unavoidable. I must not keep the Cardinal waiting. I cannot, however, consider your audience as over. Will your highness favour me by remaining in the apartments of the ladies of honour until I am free?" and, not waiting for

his reply, she hastily passes into her closet. Deluges of rain fall, flash after flash lights up the heavens, and peals of thunder rapidly succeed each other.

The Duc de Beaufort finds the Duchesse de Chevreuse and Mademoiselle de Hautefort sitting together in one of the apartments of the suite allotted to the ladies in waiting. As he enters they both rise hurriedly, and contemplate him in mute astonishment.

"Why, Duke," cries the Duchess, "is it possible? You here? You in the Louvre?"

"And why not, madame? What do these chattering women mean?" he mutters to himself. "One would think I were a monster."

"What! have you not heard, that you are accused of a plot to assassinate the Cardinal?"

"The Queen knows the particulars," broke in Mademoiselle de Hautefort. "She told me so at her lever this morning."

"Perhaps you will kindly inform me what these particulars are, madame?" replies Beaufort savagely.

"Why, Duke, you must be out of your senses!"

"Not that I know of, madame; pray let me hear of what I am accused."

"Why, that in order to take the Cardinal's life

you had stationed soldiers in ambush along the road to Longchamps, to fire on him, as he passed in his coach on his way to dine with the President Maison."

"The simple-hearted Cardinal! Imagine, your highness," cries the Duchess, "Signore Giulio, after having said his prayers, trotting along demurely in his red coach, a perfect angel—wanting only wings to fly away from a wicked world, innocent of so much as an evil thought! We know you are a *Frondeur*, Duke, but you are also a barbarian to desire the life of such a saint," and the Duchess laughs her merry laugh.

"Perhaps, madame," says Beaufort, turning towards Mademoiselle de Hautefort, "you will have the goodness to proceed in the relation of my supposed crime?"

"I have neither the wit nor the high spirits of her Grace of Lorraine," replies she, "to jest. I assure you, Duke, it is a very grave matter. You are in the utmost danger. The Cardinal has made her Majesty believe that his life was only saved by the accidental arrival of the Duc d'Orléans—who was going to dine at the same party—on horseback, and who, as a violent shower of rain came on, dismounted and got into the Cardinal's coach. His

presence saved the Cardinal, the guard could not fire upon his Royal Highness. You may imagine the agitation of her Majesty."

"Capital, capital!" exclaims the Duchess, clapping her hands, and still laughing; "admirably done. I never gave your highness credit for so much invention. What a pity the Duc d'Orléans did not start a little sooner," adds she, in a lower voice, "or that it rained! Signor Giulio would have been in heaven by this time."

The Duc de Beaufort sees that Mademoiselle de Hautefort looks both concerned and vexed at this levity. He had left his mother and sister as he entered in tears. Was it possible all this might be true?

"I beseech you, Duke, to leave the Louvre while you can," says Mademoiselle de Hautefort, very earnestly.

"But I am waiting here, madame, at the express command of her Majesty, until Mazarin, with whom she is now engaged in the council-chamber, retires."

"Are they alone?" asks the Duchess.

"Yes, madame."

"Then, Duke, I do advise you at once to escape while you can. If her Majesty told you to remain, and she is now closeted with Mazarin, the sooner

you pass the gates of Paris the better; unless your highness particularly desire to air the best set of rooms in the Bastille; and even they are dull," she adds, with that invincible desire to laugh and make others laugh, at once her charm and her defect.

Careless as is the Duc de Beaufort, his confidence is shaken. He had taken up his velvet cap to depart, when a knock is heard at the door.

"Come in," cries the Duchess.

It was Guitaut, Captain of the Queen's Guards. He walks up to the Duke, and lays his hand on his shoulder: "I command your highness to follow me, in the name of the King and of the Queen-Regent."

Even the Duchess becomes serious.

Beaufort eyes Guitaut for some time in silence. "This is very strange, Guitaut. There must be some mistake. I am here by her Majesty's commands, awaiting a further audience."

"I know nothing of that, your highness. My instructions are precise. You are under arrest."

Beaufort unbuckles his sword. He presents it to Guitaut. Then he turns to the Duchess and Mademoiselle de Hautefort, whose countenances express the concern they both feel. "You are witness, ladies, that I, a prince of the blood, am

arrested when, in obedience to her Majesty's commands, I am awaiting the honour of a further audience. *Pardieu*, that sneaking varlet, Mazarin, shall pay for this. The Coadjutor will revenge me. Lead on, Guitaut. Where is it to be? The Bastille?"

"I have orders to conduct your highness to the Castle of Vincennes," replies Guitaut, bowing.

"To Vincennes! And by the Queen's order! *Ventre de ma vie!* she is a traitress after all!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

MIDNIGHT VISITORS.

THE Queen could no longer appear in the streets without insult. The mob laughed in her face, and called her *Madame Anne.* They saluted Mazarin with howls, as her *Bon ami;* some said *Amant.* The words sound much alike when shouted by a mob, and are not indeed always different in point of fact. Gondi, in the parliament, uttered thrilling words about *la belle France* going to perdition between a Spanish regent and an Italian minister. No president was found to rebuke him. Indeed, when he demanded that the law respecting aliens holding offices of state, passed against Concini (Maréchal d'Ancre) in the regency of Marie de Medici, should be amended to suit the present crisis, his words were received with such a fury of applause that the roof was very nearly brought down about his head. Yet if any single member of that noisy parliament had been asked what

national misfortune he dreaded, what unpunished crime, what neglect, or what personal hardship he desired to redress, he would have found it difficult to answer. It was the fashion for every one to be discontented and to rebel. If citizens, to call themselves *Frondeurs;* if nobles, *Importants.* To object to everything; to harass the Government, refuse to pay taxes and subsidies; and to threaten to call in Spain on the most trivial pretences. And this because two duchesses had quarrelled, and certain hungry princes had lost the sinecures they craved for. Thus began the civil war of the Fronde, which lasted during the whole of the minority of Louis XIV.

Mazarin, when he heard that the parliament, lashed on by Gondi, the Coadjutor, seriously proposed to revive an obsolete law, which would connect his name with that of Concini, who had been shot down like a dog within the precincts of the Louvre, was alarmed. Not being a soldier like Richelieu, nor a patriot like De Retz, but only a soft-spoken Italian, with a slight frame,—no unnecessary bones or muscles,—long thin hands, and a sallow, womanish face, he applied to the all-powerful Condé for help. Condé effected a compromise with Gondi. So no more was heard of the obnoxious law

at that particular time. But the parliament had, like a young lion, tasted blood in the way of power, liked it, and was not to be appeased. Spite of Condé, seditious edicts and offensive measures, all suggested by the Coadjutor, continued to be passed; and Mazarin shut himself up within four walls, fearing for his very life.

It is night and very dark; only a few ill-trimmed lamps placed on pulleys across the street, and under the signs of the various shops, at long distances from each other, cast a dim and flickering light. The unpaved streets are muddy and full of holes; a mob is collecting in the darkness between the Louvre, the Church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, and the garden of the Palais Royal. It thickens every moment; group after group of men and some women emerge from the gloom. They pour down from Saint-Jacques and from Saint-Antoine, from the quays and the heart of the old Roman city about Notre-Dame and the Hôtel Dieu. They gather from all quarters. Before an hour has passed, a dense multitude, many thousands in number, are packed together. Those who stand under the dim lamps have a dogged, resolute look. All eyes are directed towards the Palais Royal, separated by a high wall from the street. The huge building rises

up a gaunt mass before them. Not a light is to be seen at any of the windows; not a sentinel is visible, they are withdrawn within the postern. Threats and oaths and ribald jests pass from mouth to mouth loudly and without fear; savage cries and shouts of laughter ring along the silent streets. Anne of Austria, with her two sons, is within the palace. She is quite aware what is passing without. From an upper window, in a darkened room, she watches the citizens pressing closer and closer to the gates. From amid the tumult, groans and imprecations are now audible; the words reach her ears. "Where is the little King?" cries one. "We will see him!" shrieks another. "You fool! he is not here," answers a third, a smith, as black as his forge, from the slums of Saint-Antoine. "Why not? where should he be but at home?" another voice asks. "We will force the gates, and find him!" roars a stumpy man, with stentorian voice, shaking his fist, and struggling to the front. "Find him! where will you find him? he is in Spain," shouts one at his elbow. "Curses on the Italian priest!" howl many voices in horrible chorus. This cry excites the entire multitude to frenzy; it is taken up from all parts, and a volley of groans and curses for a time drowns all else. The crowd surges to and

fro, like breakers on a rocky shore. Each moment it approaches nearer the palace. A tall spare man, an emissary of De Retz, who all along has taken an active part in inciting the people, seizes on the moment as propitious, and calls out in a loud voice, "Death to Mazarin!" Thousands re-echo, "Death to Mazarin!" With hideous gesticulations they throw their arms aloft; caps fly into the air; innumerable hands are clapped in savage applause. "Death to Mazarin!" passes down the lines of the long streets. It is heard at the crossways, and at every side alley and opening, dying away in the far distance into indistinct murmurs.

The Queen hears this death-cry standing at the darkened window, and trembles. Again the maddened people shout, "Down with Mazarin!" and again, "Down with him!" is echoed from afar. "He has spirited away our little Louis into Spain to kill him!" "He has murdered the Regent!" yells out the tall, spare man, forcing his way hither and thither. "Death to the traitor!" "To the gallows with all foreigners!" is the murderous response of the mob.

Fresh cries now arise, led by the tall, spare man with the powerful voice. "Vive Gondi, our noble bishop! We will have Gondi! the Queen shall

choose Gondi, our Coadjutor!" "Come forth and answer to us, Dame Anne!" shrieks a shrill woman's voice, very near the palace, during a momentary lull. "Come forth, or we will break in and shoot you! Where is our *Roi des Halles?* Where is Beaufort? Come out to us, and speak like an honest woman! Let Beaufort free!—Give up your lover, Mazarin!" bellows a fat beldame from the Halles. "Give up the *bon ami*, and we will roast him at the Grève, and dance round the bonfire!" and hideous peals of laughter, yells, hisses, and imprecations rise out of the night. Then, growing impatient, the whole mass, with one accord, vociferate, "We will see the King! where is the King? Show us the little King, or we will set fire to the palace. The King! the King!"

A tremendous rush is made from behind; those in front fall down, screaming that they are killed; others trample upon their bodies. The gates are forced; the foremost find themselves within the court. Pushed on by the press from behind, they now stand under the colonnade, then beneath the portico, on past the Queen's Guards, who, commanded only to defend, not to attack, stand back with drawn swords in their hands, darkly eyeing the rioters. The lofty portals of the Palais Royal are

wide open; there are lights within the ample hall. Beyond is the grand staircase, with gilded banisters. Finding no obstacle, they mount the stairs. On the first landing a woman stands, immovable. It is the Queen. She is alone. She is pale, but betrays no fear. The rude intruders draw back, amazed at the vision of majesty and loveliness before them. Anne of Austria beckons to them to advance. She places her finger on her lip, commanding silence. The rabble, before so noisy, are instantly hushed as by a charm. Signing to the foremost to follow her, she leads the way, through sumptuous chambers and vaulted galleries, to the King's sleeping-room. She approaches his little bed of gilt lattice-work, and gently drawing aside the lace curtains, displays Louis XIV. in the sound and tranquil sleep of childhood. The citizen *Frondeurs* are satisfied. The mothers bless his baby face and rich auburn curls. The men contemplate the Queen with awe. She stands beside the bed, surveying them with royal unconcern. When they have stared their full at the little King and at her, those who have already entered turn back. No others dare approach. Ashamed and silent, they retreat across the halls and sculptured galleries in a very different spirit to that in which they came.

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Anne of Austria grows more and more devout. She spends long hours in her oratory, prostrate before an image of the Magdalene. She often retires to the Val de Grâce, where she has built a splendid church, as a thank-offering for the birth of her sons. For days together she wears closely fitting serge dresses, buttoned up to the throat, like a lay nun. She fasts, and chastises herself with a severity proper alike to a sinner or a saint.

Yet there are whispers, and confidences, and anecdotes touching her intimacy with Cardinal Mazarin, not quite in accordance with such excessive austerity.

It is a *liaison* too public for intrigue, uneasy enough for marriage!

The constant reproaches she addresses to her ladies in waiting for their lack of devotion, tends rather to enrage than to edify these pretty sinners. Mademoiselle de Pons, with a smile and a toss of the head, draws Mademoiselle de la Mothe into a corner, and repeats some hard words the Queen has spoken to her. Mademoiselle de Hautefort, of a quick, impulsive temperament, is continually either in a passion or in tears. The Duchesse de Chevreuse is unusually grave, and more silent than she ever was before. The

Duchesse de Noailles, lady of the bed-chamber, her attendance at the Palais Royal over, orders her coach and, in company with the Duchesse de Sennécy, returns home to her hôtel in the Place Royale, in a very bad humour. Here a party of ladies, "her nineteen bosom friends," are awaiting her arrival. They are all eager for gossip, and all pledged to a vow of eternal secrecy, a promise they will keep as long as the retailer of the scandal is speaking. Coffee has been handed round in delicate cups of Oriental porcelain. Bonbons and cakes, served on trays of gold *repoussé*, have been discussed; the ladies lean back in their chairs, to listen with greater ease. Then the Duchesse de Noailles, addressing herself particularly to Madame de Sennécy and a certain Comtesse de Lude, remarkable for a thin pinched face and a very red nose, begins.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE TWO DUCHESSES.

"MESDAMES, you have asked me to give you some details of what is passing in the palace. I will do so; but do not imagine, for Heaven's sake, that I wish to spread evil reports or to act *la scandaleuse.* Far from it; as long as I remain in the Queen's service, whatever her conduct may be towards me, I shall bear it. I shall not dream of revenge."

"Oh, dear no, not in the least," the ladies murmur; "nothing can be more proper."

"But, really, when I see such an affectation of devotion, that serge gown, and no ornaments except on state receptions; such severity, too, towards every one who dresses like the rest of the world—she told me the other day my dress was too *décolleté* habit—can you conceive?—it is more than human nature can bear. It sets me remembering certain stories well known to everybody within the palace, when her Majesty wore low dresses too,

and was not *quite* such a *dévote* as she pretends to be now."

The assembled ladies assent silently. The Duchesse de Noailles, who is excited and has spoken quickly, having stopped to take breath, the Duchesse de Sennécy seizes the moment to break in—

"You may do as you please, dear Duchess, but for my part I am indignant with her Majesty. She has no gratitude. I might have ruined her years ago, when my cousin, Louise de Lafayette, could turn the late King Louis XIII. round her finger; one word from her, and the Queen would have been exiled! I am indignant, I repeat—I am actually not allowed to choose my own confessor! Her Majesty insists that I should select a Jesuit—a protégé of Mazarin—a man, as I believe, not to be trusted. And the reason she gives is, 'that it is for the good of my soul!' I can take care of my own soul, I suppose. I always confess twice a year. What is it to her Majesty if I do not confess at all?"

All the ladies murmur acquiescence, and the red-nosed Countess, Madame de Lude, says, "It is an impertinence."

"Every one must see," continues Madame de

Sennécy, speaking rapidly, for she observes that Madame de Noailles is eager to proceed, "the power Mazarin exercises over her. In her youth Richelieu loved her: now it is Mazarin. She is born to ensnare the Sacred College—perhaps his Holiness himself, if he crossed the Apennines——"

"Oh, Duchess," exclaim several voices, "how shocking!" and some ladies hold up their fans before their faces.

"Gently, madame," says Madame de Noailles, interrupting; "I detest calumny. I only speak of the past—that cannot hurt her Majesty."

"I speak of the present," cries Madame de Sennécy with irritation. "There is quite enough to talk about in the present, without recalling the past. The partiality of the Queen positively injures Mazarin. I believe that this is the principal reason of the great animosity against him among the citizens of Paris, who call themselves *Frondeurs*."

"But, my *très chère*," answers Madame de Noailles, — the Mrs. Candour of that day, who, although quite as spiteful as her friend, had more discretion, and dreaded the mischief that might arise by-and-by if the tongues of all the assembled ladies were let loose,—"but, my *très chère*, it is believed that her Majesty is privately married to Mazarin; the

Cardinal has never taken priest's orders; the Queen is a widow. Madame de Motteville is of this opinion; *enfin*, I believe it myself: else that sneaking, honey-mouthed Italian, whom we all knew as 'Signor Giulio,' secretary to the great Richelieu, would never dare to be so unkind to the King and the little Duke, or so arrogant to her Majesty."

"*Ciel!* how contemptuously Mazarin answers the Queen sometimes—how meekly she bears it!" exclaims Madame de Sennécy. "Beringhen tells me that he will not allow the King and his brother proper body-linen, and that the sheets of their beds are in holes."

"*Ah, Dieu!* what a shame," cry the ladies—"the King of France!"—and the red-nosed Countess declares, "That the parliament ought to know it."

This idea alarms Madame de Noailles extremely. She does not want to lose her place at Court, yet it is sweet to her to hear the Queen abused, who had so sternly forbade her to appear again before her in such low dresses.

"Well, Mazarin is bad enough, mesdames," cries Madame de Sennécy (not to be quelled by the frowns and signs of her senior); "he is bad enough—the blood-sucker—as that dear handsome Duc de Beaufort calls him; but, for my part, I can

tolerate him much better than those nieces of his, who come up one by one from Rome—Mancini and Martinozzi, or whatever he calls them—with their bold Italian looks and big eyes, devouring every man they see. How intolerable they are!"

"They are quite improper," puts in the red-nosed Countess, "and very ugly."

Some of the ladies say they do not think so. Others declare that they are sallow, bony, and ill-shaped. Madame de Sennécy ends the discussion by declaring that one is deformed, and that the other limps; a statement utterly untrue, but which is received as gospel. Madame de Noailles declares that she is sure the Queen would never allow such creatures to be about the Court if she could help it. It is most dangerous for his Sacred Majesty to be educated with them. He might become attached to Olympia for instance, the eldest unmarried one.

A shudder passes through the assembled ladies at such a monstrous supposition. The red-nosed Countess opines that the princes of the blood should have such hussies imprisoned in the Bastille, and fed on bread and water.

"Ah, ladies," cries Madame de Noailles, in her shrill voice, "how little you know of the intrigues of a Court! Mazarin fully intends to marry his

saucy niece, Olympia, to the King. The Queen cannot help it; she is in his power; she is his wife."

"It is to be hoped so," mutters Madame de Sennécy; and the red-nosed Countess shakes her head, and by this significant gesture endorses her doubt of the fact.

"I wish you would listen to me," says the Duchesse de Noailles peevishly. "I was alluding to some curious old stories connected with the Queen; but, perhaps, ladies you know them already," and she looks inquiringly around.

"Very imperfectly," lisps a thin demoiselle of uncertain age, who had been disappointed of the situation of maid of honour. And the red-nosed Countess settles herself in her chair, drinks another cup of coffee, and begs Madame de Noailles to proceed. Madame de Sennécy also joins in the same request. Another lady, a hanger-on of the Duchesse de Noailles, who had not yet spoken, says, "It is well known that Madame la Duchesse relates everything in such a piquante manner." Thus encouraged, the Duchess begins:—

"I desire to speak of the past. The past cannot injure her Majesty. I am without prejudice, and incapable of malice." The Duchesse de Sennécy laughs behind her fan. "I have listened to all

Madame de Sennécy has said with deep concern;" and she crosses her hands, and looks up at the ceiling with mock solemnity. "I am lady of the bed-chamber to the Queen—a position involving certain duties, certain reserves. God forbid I should forget them!" Madame de Sennécy stares at her with amazement, wondering what is coming next. "Her Majesty was so cautious formerly—so cautious, I say—nothing more—it is not likely she should commit herself now. I do not therefore agree with Madame de Sennécy in her opinion that she is privately married to Mazarin."

"Then she ought to be," the red-nosed Countess says sententiously.

"Remember she had Madame de Chevreuse to help her formerly," thrusts in Madame de Sennécy sharply.

"With your permission, ladies, I will begin my narrative. But if you interrupt me, I cannot do so," and Madame de Noailles draws herself up with an offended air. "A thousand pardons!" every one exclaims. Not a sound is heard. The Duchess, somewhat pacified, surveys her audience. "I presume, ladies, we all adore the miracle wrought in the person of his present Majesty for the continuance of the royal line; I say, in the person of our present Majesty, Louis XIV., a miracle which

was brought about by the intercession of that saint, your cousin, Mademoiselle Louise de Lafayette;" she turns towards Madame de Sennécy, who bows. "It was Mademoiselle de Lafayette who persuaded the King to visit the Queen at the Louvre. A miracle—eh, my dear friends?" and a malicious smile plays about her mouth, and she casts up her eyes and pauses; "a wonderful miracle after twenty-two years of sterility, and the King, too, almost in his grave!"

"Quite so," replies the Duchesse de Sennécy; "incredible!" All the ladies laugh. The red-nosed Countess declares she never had believed it; which was exactly what Madame de Noailles intended, though she would not have said so for the world!

"Well, after this truly miraculous event, and when their Majesties were as much alienated as ever—for the Queen never forgave the insult the King put upon her at the Val de Grâce, in summoning her before the council, and making the Chancellor search her papers — their Majesties being, I repeat, as much alienated as ever, the Beau Buckingham came to Court.[1] But, mesdames, this is a long story; you will be fatigued."

[1] George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, favourite of James I., and of his son, Charles I., assassinated by Felton, 1628.

"No, no—not in the least," answer all the ladies speaking at once. "Go on Duchess, pray go on; tell us about the Beau Buckingham. Did he not let pearls fall from his dress, and when they were picked up refuse to take them back?" asks the Duchesse de Sennécy.

"Exactly," replies Madame de Noailles. "Buckingham was a grand seigneur."

"Pray go on, madame."

"Well, mesdames, an embassy came from Charles I. of England—poor man, he had his head cut off afterwards—how perfidious those English are! —to ask the hand of our Princess Henrietta Maria —daughter of Marie de Medici and Henry IV.— in marriage. The Beau Buckingham was the ambassador chosen, and such a one was never seen before; so magnificent, so handsome, so liberal. His dress, his manners, his cortége, all were perfect. He seemed like a prince out of a fairy tale, just arrived from the moon, who spoke nothing but diamonds and rubies, and at whose feet flowers sprung up. All the ladies lost their hearts to him, the husbands shut themselves up in a rage, and the lovers hanged themselves in sheer despair!

"He soon saw how matters stood with the poor Queen. She dared scarcely open her mouth, and

looked so terrified in the presence of her husband and Cardinal Richelieu, that what with her beauty and her evident sufferings, she might have touched a heart of stone. Now the Beau Buckingham was far from having a heart of stone where the ladies were concerned. So, *le voilà amoureux*, the Beau Buckingham! Indeed, from the first moment he came to Court he saw only the Queen. To her all his looks, all his attentions, were directed,—and such looks, such devotion! *Bon Dieu*, how well I remember him in a justaucorps of white satin embroidered with gold, leaning against a pillar gazing at the Queen, who evidently was aware of his glances. His long beautiful hair streamed over his shoulders in rich chestnut curls, his noble face beamed with expression; in one hand was a cavalier's hat covered with snowy plumes, the other was placed on his heart.

"The Queen was sensible to his homage. Poor Queen! she really was very ill used; it must have been delightful to be loved at last. Indeed, it was quite evident to me, as well as to the whole Court, that Buckingham's feeling was returned. Sometimes she gazed also, nor did her looks want fire. But, mesdames, I hope you do not misunderstand me," and the Duchess glances depre-

catingly round the circle; "I assure you I am not censorious; I am only relating facts, undoubted facts, which happened long ago—in order to convince you all that Madame de Sennécy is mistaken, and that even when young her Majesty was eminently cautious. She is so still. Believe me, she is not married to Mazarin."

"Pray proceed, dear Duchess," cries Madame de Sennécy; "never mind Mazarin; your story is most interesting."

"We want to hear the *dénouement*," say all the ladies, and the red-nosed Countess opines that "it is easy to understand what that will be."

"Her Majesty used to delight in dancing. Now she often danced with Buckingham. This was only etiquette, as he represented Charles I. of England at the Court of France. Her Majesty was always very cautious, I assure you, very cautious. Buckingham did all he could to retard the negotiation of marriage, and Richelieu, who knew the Queen well and had watched her closely, having, I suppose, discovered her secret, did everything, on the contrary, to hasten his departure.

"There was a story about some diamonds—an aigrette, I believe. I never quite understood it, ladies, but of course Madame de Chevreuse did—

some diamonds that the King had given to the Queen, and which she gave to Buckingham, who was imprudent enough to wear them in public. This nearly caused her ruin, for she was surrounded by enemies and spies. The Cardinal got wind of it, and informed the King, and his Majesty called on the Queen to wear these diamonds on a certain day, and, but for the exertions of certain musketeers of the Queen's Guard, by name Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, who journeyed night and day to fetch them from England—at least, so goes the tale—Anne of Austria would have been imprisoned, or perhaps beheaded, *à la mode Anglaise*, particularly as the Cardinal preferred that mode of execution. You remember that charming Monsieur le Grand, who had his head cut off?" says Madame de Noailles, appealing to the red-nosed Countess.

"Ah! I should think so; the husband of Marion de l'Orme, the Marquis de Cinq-Mars, a sad profligate and coxcomb, who richly deserved his fate."

"At last Buckingham was to go," continues the Duchess; "he could spin out his time no longer. All the Court accompanied him to Amiens. Madame de Chevreuse was with the Queen, who did all she could to conceal her grief, for, believe me, she is very cautious. Ah! her Majesty knows what it

is to be in love though, spite of caution and serge gown, and her *petit air dévot.* She ought to be more charitable, and let her ladies dress as they please, eh, mesdames?" and the Duchess looks round, and sees every eye fixed eagerly upon her; the red-nosed Countess, with a visible sneer on her face, and Madame de Sennécy, full of gratified spite, smiling sarcastically. "Madame de Chevreuse did, ladies, hint to me, that the long evening spent at Amiens was not passed—hum!—well not passed *all* in public. For a single moment her Majesty did, extraordinary to say, forget her usual caution, and you know, ladies, a moment may do much."

All the ladies laugh behind their fans, and the red-nosed Countess gives it as her decided opinion "that the Queen is not married to Mazarin," for which the Duchesse de Sennécy warmly applauds her excellent judgment, and adds, "she had always said so."

"There was a fête at Amiens," continues Madame de Noailles, her eyes sparkling with malice, "a shady garden, and a moon not too bright—a lover's moon, we will say—revealing much, not all. It is certain that by the management of Madame de Chevreuse, the Queen and Buckingham had a charming little *àpart* during the fête, in a grove at the end of the gardens, near the city walls.

There was a cry, and Putange, who was in waiting, but—instructed by Madame de Chevreuse—standing apart, though within call, hearing the Queen's voice, rushed forward and found her nearly fainting, and Buckingham on his knees before her."

"*Bagatelle !*" breaks in Madame de Sennécy, "what a romantic story !"

"Certain it is, Buckingham sailed from France that same night. Madame de Chevreuse had too much on her own hands (*en fait d'amour*) to know more than what Putange told her. Buckingham sailed, the Queen returned ill to Paris, and was nursed by the Duchesse de Chevreuse. Some say that Buckingham returned again privately. At all events, the Queen, as long as Richelieu and Louis XIII. lived, led a miserable life. Mesdames," and the Duchesse de Noailles gives a triumphant glance round the circle, "I have proved, I think, that her Majesty is seldom incautious," and the Duchess smiles a bitter smile, and again looks round for approval and acquiescence.

Just as the ladies had all risen with great animation to give their various opinions and to thank the Duchess, the rattle of a heavy coach is heard below. In a few moments the door is flung open, and Madame la Duchesse de Chevreuse is announced.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"PUT NOT THY TRUST IN PRINCES."

MADAME DE NOAILLES rises to receive the Duchesse de Chevreuse, and kisses her with effusion, but is startled at the sight of her blanched face and despondent air. She is plainly dressed in a dark travelling costume, bows to the Duchesse de Sennécy and to the other ladies, and sinks down on a couch.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?" asks Madame de Noailles, with intense curiosity, taking her by the hand; "you are strangely altered since I left the palace a few hours since."

The Duchesse de Chevreuse glances at the circle of ladies, the "nineteen bosom friends," whose eyes are riveted upon her as if to read her thoughts. The red-nosed Countess in particular has advanced close to her, in order not to lose a syllable; her mouth is wide open, to assist her ears in listening.

"I have come on private business of some im-

portance to myself, dear Duchess," says Madame de Chevreuse, speaking under her breath. "I did not know that you received this evening. It is unfortunate."

Madame de Noailles, who is dying to hear what she has to say, looks at her guests with an unmistakable expression. The Duchesse de Sennécy rises at once.

"Allow me to wish you good evening, my dear friend," says she, and departs. The red-nosed Countess is forced to rise and follow her example, how much against her will it is plain to see; the other ladies retire with her.

Madame de Noailles and the Duchesse de Chevreuse are now alone. Madame de Chevreuse heaves a profound sigh; a tear rolls down her cheek, out of which the dimples are faded. Her thin lips are white, and she shivers.

"Tell me, Duchess, what misfortune has happened?" asks Madame de Noailles, taking her hand.

"A misfortune, yes, for I love her—I love her dearly. I have devoted my life to serve her; without me she would not now be Regent of France."

Madame de Chevreuse speaks in broken sentences;

her looks are wild; her mind seems to wander; her large prominent eyes are fixed on vacancy.

"Duchess, for God's sake rouse yourself. What has happened? Is it the Queen?" And Madame de Noailles wrings the hand of her friend to rouse her.

"Yes—it is the Queen," replies Madame de Chevreuse slowly, becoming more conscious, and gazing at her. "Her Majesty has dismissed me. I am on my way to Tours—exiled."

"Gracious heaven!" exclaims Madame de Noailles; "what ingratitude!"

"Duchess, I thank you for your sympathy; but, I beseech you, say not one word against my beloved mistress. When I entered this room it seemed to me that sorrow had made me mad—my brain was on fire. I am better now, and calmer. My royal mistress may live to want me, as she has so often done before. She may recall me. At Court—in exile—absent or present, I am her humble and devoted slave."

"She will want no one as long as she has Mazarin," says the Duchess, with a sneer.

"So I fear," returns Madame de Chevreuse.

"But what has happened since I left the palace?" again eagerly asks Madame de Noailles.

"I will tell you. I have never been the same

to her Majesty since the old days, when I was banished, after the Val de Grâce, by Richelieu. She received me well after I returned, when she was Regent; but I have loved her too devotedly not to feel the difference. While, on my side, the long years that I had spent flying over Europe to escape the machinations of the Cardinal, had only made me more devoted to her, the Queen—who formerly trusted me with every thought—had grown serious, reserved, and ascetic. I am pious enough myself,"—and a gleam of fun passes into her weary face, and causes her eyes to sparkle,—"I never eat meat in Lent, and always confess at Easter. But her Majesty has become a bigot. She was always reproving me, too, for those little *agaceries* (vanities she called them) which no one lives without. 'My age,' she said, 'forbade them.' Now I only own to forty, Duchess; that is not an age to go into a convent, and to think of nothing but my soul. Why should I not enjoy myself a little yet?" And her large eyes find their way to a mirror opposite, and dwell on it with evident complacency.

"But the Queen reproaches everybody," returns Madame de Noailles. "Conceive—she reprimanded me for wearing a dress too *décolleté*."

Madame de Chevreuse smiles faintly; for it was indeed true that the older Madame de Noailles grew, the lower her dresses were cut.

"People who hated me made the Queen believe," continues Madame de Chevreuse, "that I wanted to govern her—to use her patronage. If it were so, I should have done it long ago. It was the Princesse de Condé who told the Queen so; she hates me. When I assured her Majesty that it was false, she seemed to believe me. Then came the affair of Madame de Montbazon and the letters found in her room, one of which she said was written by the Duchesse de Longueville, the daughter of my enemy, the Princesse de Condé. How could I help what my stepmother said?—she is a spoilt beauty, and very injudicious—but her Majesty blamed me, nevertheless. I implored her to forgive my stepmother; and for this purpose, I offered her Majesty yesterday a collation in those fine gardens, kept by Regnard, beyond the chestnut avenue of the Tuileries—you know these gardens, Duchess?"

"I do," replies Madame de Noailles.

"Her Majesty had often wished to go there. I asked my stepmother to be present, in the full belief that the Queen's kind heart would relent when she saw her, and that she would restore

her to favour. Alas! I was mistaken. I do not know the Queen now, she is so changed. She came accompanied by the Princesse de Condé. No sooner had she set eyes on Madame de Montbazon, who was conversing with me, than the Queen gave me a furious glance, called the Princesse de Condé to her side, and bid her command the attendance of her pages; then, without another word, her Majesty turned her back on me, entered her coach, and departed."

"Heavens!" exclaims Madame de Noailles, turning up her eyes, "no one is safe, unless they are allies of Cardinal Mazarin."

"An hour afterwards,"—and the Duchesse de Chevreuse raises her handkerchief to her eyes,—"I received an order to quit Paris for Tours. Alas, I have not deserved it!"

"It is the Cardinal," cries Madame de Noailles. "He will drive out all her old friends; they are inconvenient——"

While she speaks the door opens, and Mademoiselle de Hautefort enters the saloon, unannounced. She is bathed in tears: her eyes are swollen with excessive weeping; she cannot repress her sobs. The two ladies rise, and endeavour to soothe her; but her passionate sorrow is not to be appeased. For

some time she cannot utter a word. Madame de Chevreuse hung over her affectionately.

"Dearest friend," she says, kissing her, "I guess what has happened. You are exiled; so am I. Come with me into Touraine; let us comfort each other until better days."

"Oh, speak not to me of better days," sobs Mademoiselle de Hautefort. "They can never come to me. My dear, dear mistress, you have broken my heart!" and she bursts into a fresh passion of tears.

The Duchesse de Chevreuse sits down beside her and chafes her hand. Madame de Noailles, who sees in the departure of these two ladies a chance of greater promotion and increased confidence for herself, forms her countenance into an expression of concern she does not in the least feel.

"My dear friend," says Madame de Chevreuse, endeavouring to calm the agony of grief which shook the whole frame of Mademoiselle de Hautefort, "let us share our sorrow."

"The Queen must think herself rich in friends, to cast away such devoted servants," observes Madame de Noailles sententiously, contemplating the group through her eye-glass. "Do speak, Mademoiselle de Hautefort."

She had gradually become more collected, and her violent sobs had ceased; but now and then her bosom heaves, as bitter recollections of the past float through her mind.

"Speak," whispers the Duchesse de Chevreuse in her softest voice, "it will relieve you. In what manner did our royal mistress dismiss you?"

"Late last evening," answers Mademoiselle de Hautefort, in a tremulous voice, stopping every now and then to sigh, and to wipe the tears that streamed from her eyes, "Mademoiselle de Motteville and I were assisting the Queen at her coucher, and as is our habit we were conversing familiarly with her. The Queen was undressed, and just preparing to get into bed. She had only her last prayer to say, for she lives on prayer, like a true saint." Madame de Noailles draws down the corners of her mouth and scarcely endeavours to hide her derision. Even the Duchesse de Chevreuse smiles. "Mademoiselle de Motteville and her sister the Comtesse de Jars, and Mademoiselle de Beaumont, had just left the ante-room from whence they had been speaking with the Queen. I was on my knees before her taking off her shoes, when I remembered that a gentleman, who attends upon the ladies in waiting, called Nédo, a Breton—you knew

him, Duchess?" Madame de Chevreuse answered that she did. "Had asked me to obtain a better appointment for him." Mademoiselle de Hautefort pauses. The scene seems to rise before her, and a fresh fit of violent sobbing prevents her from speaking. "Alas!" she exclaims at last, "why — why did I presume to trouble her Majesty for such a trifle? A stranger to me too! I have lost what was dearer to me than life—herself. She refused me," continues Mademoiselle de Hautefort, "I was nettled. Oh, Duchess," says she, turning to Madame de Chevreuse, "how often have you borne my hasty temper! How I reproach myself now! That temper has ruined—undone me!"

"What would Monsieur le Maréchal de Schomberg say if he heard your self-reproaches?" asks Madame de Noailles slily.

"Do not name him to me," cries Mademoiselle de Hautefort impatiently. "Schomberg is nothing to me in comparison with the Queen. Had I remained with her, I could never, never have married!"

"Well, you will now," and the Duchess laughs. "But what happened? Do go on."

"Alas! I lost my temper. I was irritated at

her Majesty refusing me so small a favour. I told her she had forgotten the claims of her old friends, who had suffered so much in her service."

"That was wrong, ungenerous," interposes Madame de Chevreuse. "A favour ceases to be a favour, if it be made a subject of reproach; besides——"

"Ah! I know it too well!" and Mademoiselle de Hautefort almost groans with anguish; "and it is that which breaks my heart; it is my own fault. The Queen, in one moment, became more excited than I had ever seen her. Her face turned crimson, she threw herself on her bed, commanded me to close the curtains, and to retire. I disobeyed her. I could not help it. I cast myself on the ground within the *ruelle* of her bed. I clasped my hands. I told her I called God to witness of my love, my devotion to her. I implored her to recall the past, to remember his Majesty Louis XIII."

"Ah! you were very wrong," exclaims Madame de Chevreuse; "most impolitic, most undutiful. You have a good heart, mademoiselle, but you are too impulsive."

"It is true," answers Mademoiselle de Hautefort humbly. "Her Majesty grew more and

more displeased, she said that she must have me know she would allow no one about her who did not love and respect her; then she went on to say that I had made observations upon her valued servant, Cardinal Mazarin, which were very displeasing to her. I replied too hastily that it was my care for her honour that had made me do so; that reports were circulating injurious to her, and that I longed to see the departure of a minister whose presence compromised her."

"What imprudence!" cries Madame de Chevreuse, lifting up her hands. "How could you dare to say this?"

"It is quite true, however," rejoins Madame de Noailles, "and it was the part of a true friend to tell her."

"Would to God I had been silent!" continues Mademoiselle de Hautefort; "no sooner were the words out of my mouth than the Queen sternly ordered me to extinguish the lights and to withdraw. I rose from my knees more dead than alive and departed. When I awoke this morning I received an order commanding me not to approach within forty miles of the Court. Oh it is dreadful!"

"Come with me into Touraine, my carriage

waits below. We will stop at your lodgings in order to give your people time to pack. Come, dear friend, we have lived side by side among the splendours of a court, we have suffered persecution for the same mistress, we love her devotedly, spite of all injuries. Let us now comfort each other in exile."

Mademoiselle de Hautefort casts herself into the arms of the Duchess.

"You will not keep her long," observes Madame de Noailles with a smile, "we shall soon see her back at Court, as Madame la Maréchale de Schomberg, more blooming than ever."

"No, no," sobs Mademoiselle de Hautefort. "Never!"

"Adieu, madame," says the Duchesse de Chevreuse, saluting Madame de Noailles, and taking Mademoiselle de Hautefort by the hand. "Excuse our abrupt departure, but the sooner we quit Paris the better. My friend and I would desire in all things to obey her Majesty's pleasure. Let us hope to meet in happier days. *Ma chère*," adds she more gaily, addressing the maid of honour, "we shall not die of *ennui* at my château."

Mademoiselle de Hautefort only replies with sobs. The idea of departing overcame her.

"Some gentlemen of our acquaintance will attend us."

"How like the Duchess! She cannot exist without lovers," mutters Madame de Noailles, to herself. Meanwhile she attended the two ladies to the head of the staircase, with great apparent affection kissing them on both cheeks. She watched their departure from a window and waved her hand to them, affecting to weep.

"What a relief they are gone!" she exclaims, taking out her watch. "*Ma foi*, how long they have stayed! It is time for me to dress for the Queen's circle. Now they are gone, there is no one in my way at Court. I am sure of favour—perhaps of confidence. Her Majesty must unbosom herself to some one; why not to me? In half an hour I must be at the palace," and she rang and ordered her coach.

The Duchesse de Chevreuse was never again called to the side of Anne of Austria. Her hatred of Cardinal Mazarin forbade it. She became one of the principal leaders of that "Ladies' Battle," the Fronde.

Nor was Mademoiselle de Hautefort ever forgiven her bluntness on the Queen's very equivocal behaviour. As Maréchale de Schomberg, however,

she re-appeared at Court, but found Anne of Austria lost to her for ever.

The Duchesse de Noailles wore dresses cut in accordance with her Majesty's taste. Although she never became the Queen's confidante, for many years she held a high station at Court.

CHAPTER L.

CHARLES STUART.

Louise de Montpensier—only daughter of Gaston, Duc d'Orléans, second son of Henry IV. and of Marie de Bourbon-Montpensier—was, as has been said, the greatest heiress in Europe. Her girlhood was passed with Anne of Austria. When Louis XIV. was born the Queen called her *ma fille.* When Mademoiselle romped with the boy-king, she addressed him as *mon mari.*

In spite of the long nose of the Bourbons, *la Grande Mademoiselle,* as she was called, was fairly good looking. She was tall and shapely, with regular features, a good skin, finely cut blue eyes, pencilled eyebrows, a large, though well-formed mouth, and good teeth. Flowing ringlets of light hair framed her face and fell over her rounded shoulders. She had, moreover, an unmistakable air of command.

Her character may be best described in negatives.

She was not a heroine, although circumstances made her appear one. She understood politics, but had little capacity for a ruler. She had no fortitude, although possessing a certain elevation of character that lifted her above commonplace. She was selfish and cold-hearted, yet capable of warm feelings. She was ostentatious in the use of her great wealth, but not charitable. She was blinded by conceit, yet was not wanting in shrewdness and judgment. She was haughty, yet loved to condescend to the populace. She was exceedingly ridiculous, yet affected extreme dignity. Whatever advantages she possessed were but too well known to herself. Of her faults—and they were many—she was entirely ignorant. Placed between two parties, the Queen and the Fronde, she was courted by both, and became headstrong and ambitious in consequence. Although she ardently desired to marry her cousin Louis XIV., she went out of her way to offend, nay, even to outrage him. Yet unconscious of all her follies, to the day of her death she firmly believed she was by wealth, position, and genius raised upon a pedestal which all Europe contemplated with admiring curiosity. Every crowned bachelor within the civilised world, according to her, sought her hand in marriage.

After the defeat at Worcester, Charles Stuart escaped to the Continent. His mother had already fled to France. Poor Henrietta Maria (wrinkled, and prematurely old, with tear-furrowed cheeks, and dull, hollow eyes, her fragrant curls, so often painted by Vandyke, grown grey, her royal carriage bowed by the weight of adversity) lived with her young daughter Henrietta, afterwards Duchesse d'Orléans, sister-in-law of Louis XIV., at the Louvre, in right of her birth as a *Fille de France*. For a time this Queen of Shadows, the relict of a defunct monarchy, bore the splendour of her former state. But one by one her ladies in waiting, grooms of the chamber, maids of honour, footmen, chamberlains, and pages disappeared. At last she grew too poor even to procure sufficient fuel to keep out the winter cold. Though living in a palace, she was glad, with the young princess her daughter, to lie in bed for the sake of warmth.

Mademoiselle patronised this afflicted relative, and frequently visited her. But she does not appear to have ministered to her necessities. Henrietta was resigned, even humble to the exalted princess, her niece; and dwelt often on the personal charms of her eldest son, Charles Stuart.

She painted him with a brush dipped in the

roseate colours of a mother's fancy. He was, she said, brave, gallant, handsome, witty, accomplished. He had splendid black hair, a rich complexion, as of one much exposed to battles and an adventurous life, and the bearing of a Paladin. He would be certain to crush his enemies, and sit upon his father's throne, she told her niece. But the wily heiress, while she listened to the eager gossip of the broken-hearted Queen, was pre-occupied by a matrimonial intrigue carried on by a certain Abbé de la Rivière, to make her Empress of Germany.

"I perfectly understood my aunt's drift," she says; "but I liked the Emperor better."

When Charles Stuart, having escaped almost by a miracle from England, arrived at Fontainebleau, where the Court was staying, he was presented to Mademoiselle by his mother. Charles saluted her as a cousin and a friend, saluted her in dumb show, however, for he could speak no French. The exiled Queen, therefore (already grasping in anticipation the revenues of the principalities, dukedoms, forests, and castles of her wealthy niece), set herself to act interpreter.

Charles Stuart had a melting eye and a manly presence. He dallied with his cousin, sat beside her when she played, led her to her coach, held the

flambeau while she adjusted her dress, was again found at her door—having run on in front—to assist her to descend, and generally ogled, languished, gazed, and sighed, to the very utmost of his power. But a dumb lover is dull, and love-making by proxy never answers. *La Grande Mademoiselle*, already in imagination invested with the diadem of an Empress, did not fancy a prince who was only an exile, and who could not even plead his own cause. She looked on him as a bore—indeed, worse than a bore, an object of pity.

The Queen of England tried hard to melt her heart. She even coaxed her; with her own hands she decked her soft hair with jewels for her Majesty's ballet. She flattered her into a belief that she was as beautiful as Venus. She declared that Charles Stuart's heart was breaking, that his health suffered, that he would die. No mother ever served a son better than did this poor distracted lady. But there was her son, with his swarthy, hard face, as strong and hale as an oak sapling, his wanton black eye wandering over the belles of the French Court,—a living contradiction to all she said! At last, Charles Stuart, who cared less for the well-filled purse and boundless dominions of his cousin than his mother, who

knew what it was to be pinched with cold and hunger, grew impatient, and insisted on an answer. He sent Lord St. Germains to Mademoiselle to say that he was so passionately in love with her, he could no longer bear suspense. Mademoiselle replied with the discretion of a maiden, and the judgment of an heiress, conscious that she was dealing with a royal fortune-hunter—

"The Prince of Wales did her great honour, but as she understood that he required much pecuniary assistance to recover the Crown of England, his birthright, she feared she might find herself overwhelmed with expenses incompatible with the wants of a person of her exalted rank. That she must, in consequence, make sacrifices and adopt resolutions difficult to contemplate. That she might risk the loss of her entire possessions on the chance of Charles's re-conquering his kingdom; and that, having been educated in splendour as one of the greatest princesses in the world, the prospect alarmed her."

Yet there must have been some charm about the hard-featured, stalwart youth that attracted her; she would not say, "No." In order to throw down a bait, she hinted that she desired him to change his religion.

"Impossible, madame," was the reply of Lord St. Germains. "A king of England cannot change his religion. He would exclude himself for ever from the throne!"

Again, however, Charles was permitted to approach her, and to make a last attempt. She relished a little mild flirtation with an exiled King, although she vastly preferred marriage with an Emperor. Nevertheless, she curled her hair in honour of the occasion, a thing not usual with her.

"Ah, look at her!" said the Queen-Regent, when she appeared in the evening: "it is easy to see she is expecting a lover. See!—how she is decked out!"

Mademoiselle blushed, but was too discreet to commit herself by a single word.

When Charles Stuart entered the Queen's saloon he looked provokingly well. His mother, nervously alive to every trifle, felt this. A man with such a constitution was not adapted to play the part of a despairing lover. When questioned by the Queen about his affairs in England, he replied that he knew nothing. Mademoiselle instantly formed a bad opinion of him. She turned to her lady in waiting, Madame de Fiesque, and whispered—

"He is too much of a Bourbon for me. Quite engrossed by trifles" (*the race has not changed*). "He can talk about dogs and horses and the chase to her Majesty, but he has nothing to say about the revolution in England."

Later in the evening, at the royal table, Mademoiselle was shocked at Charles's coarse appetite. He despised orlotans and Italian pastry, and threw himself upon a joint of beef. Not satisfied with that, he ended by a shoulder of mutton. "A despairing lover ought not to have such a monstrous appetite, or he should satisfy the cravings of hunger beforehand," thought Mademoiselle. He stared fixedly at her, with his big black eyes shaded by heavy eyebrows, even while he was shovelling huge pieces of meat down his throat, but he never spoke. Truly this was not a fashion of pushing his suit with a fastidious princess who desired to be an empress!

Mademoiselle yawned, looked at him under her eyelids, shrugged her shapely shoulders, and called her lady in waiting to her side to amuse her. Thus passed the precious moments which were to decide the momentous question—would she, or would she not?

At length, having gorged in a prodigious manner,

Charles Stuart rose. He made Mademoiselle a formal bow, and opened his mouth to speak for the first time. "I hope," he said, in very bad French, "my Lord St. Germains has explained to your Highness the sentiments with which you have inspired me. I am, madame, your very humble servant."

Mademoiselle rose to her feet, made him a formal curtsey, and replied, "Sir, I am your very humble servant."

So ended this wooing; but poor Henrietta Maria, figuratively rending her clothes and sprinkling ashes on her head at such a conclusion, could not let Mademoiselle off without one Parthian shot. "I see," said she, "my son is too poor and too unfortunate for you, my niece. It is quite possible, however, that a king of eighteen may be better worth having than an elderly emperor with four children." This little ebullition of spite is pardonable in an unfortunate Queen whose heart was broken. Let it not lie heavy on her memory!

Meanwhile, the struggle between the Queen-Regent and her ministers on one side, and the parliament and Gondi on the other, had become more and more envenomed. At length the Queen-

Regent, under advice of Mazarin, resolved by a *coup d'état* to restore the royal authority.

It is Twelfth-night. Anne of Austria is spending the evening in her closet, watching the King and his brother, the Duc d'Anjou—both dressed in character—struggle on the floor over the remains of the cake from which they had dug the "bean" and the "ring." Louis XIV. is a handsome boy, docile yet spirited; Philip of Anjou is puny, peevish, and cowardly.

Anne of Austria leans against the back of a chair, and watches the two boys. Her ladies watch her. There is a strange rumour that her Majesty is to leave Paris that very night. To look into her placid face, such an idea seems absurd. By-and-by, Mazarin and some of the princes of the blood come in to ask her pleasure for the morrow. They do not remain, as there is a supper at the Maréchal de Grammont's in honour of the day. When they are gone, the Queen turns to Madame de la Trémouille.

"I shall go to-morrow to the Val de Grâce. Give orders that everything may be ready for me. Call Beringhen; it is time for his Majesty and the Duke to go to bed."

The King at once comes forward to bid his mother good night. The Duke begins to cry.

"What is it, my son?" says the Queen.

"I want, Madame, to go with you to the Val de Grâce to-morrow—do let me!" and he kneels and kisses her hand.

"If I go, my son, I promise to take you. Now, good night, Philip," and she raises him in her arms, and kisses him; "do not keep his Majesty waiting."

She retires early. Those ladies who do not sleep at the Palais Royal leave, and the gates are closed.

At three o'clock in the morning, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, at the Palace of the Luxembourg, is awakened by a violent knocking. She rouses her women, and orders them to see who is there. It is a messenger from the Queen.

"Let him enter," says Mademoiselle, speaking from her bed. It is well to say that Mademoiselle was entirely concealed by heavy curtains, and that the bed stood in a deep alcove.

"The Captain of the Queen's Guard awaits your highness's pleasure," calls out Monsieur de Comminges, from the door.

"What has brought you here at this time of

night, Comminges?" asks Mademoiselle from her bed.

"Your highness, the Court is leaving Paris secretly. Her Majesty commands your attendance. Here is a letter which will explain the Queen's wishes."

"Monsieur de Comminges," replies Mademoiselle —who at that time had not conceived the possibility of being one of the *à la mode* leaders of the Fronde, and pointing the guns of the Bastille against her cousin, the King—putting the letter under her pillow, "the commands of her Majesty are sufficient for me. I need no letter to enforce them. Retire, Monsieur le Capitaine, into the ante-room. I will rise instantly, and accompany you. But tell me, Monsieur de Comminges"—calling after him—"where are we to go to?"

"To Saint-Germain en Laye, your highness."

In a short time Mademoiselle is ready. Without waiting for her women, or what she calls her "equipage" (which she desired to have sent after her), she goes out into the night accompanied by Monsieur de Comminges, whose coach waits without. It was pitch dark, but with the help of a flambeau they traverse the unpaved and ill-lit streets, and reach the garden entrance of the Palais

Royal without accident. There they find another coach drawn up under some trees. Within sits Anne of Austria; the two princes are each in a corner—Louis XIV. very sleepy and cross, the Duc d'Anjou crying. Mademoiselle is instantly transferred into the royal coach.

"Are you frightened, my cousin?" asks the Queen, speaking out of the darkness to Mademoiselle.

"Not in the least, Madame," is her reply. "I will follow your Majesty anywhere," and she takes her place opposite to her in the coach.

It is a long and weary drive to Saint-Germain. When they arrive it is breakfast-time. But the Queen commands every creature, including her children, into the chapel to hear mass. As soon as they had time to look round, they find the palace (a dreary, gaunt edifice at all times) cold and wretched beyond description in a dark January morning. The rooms are entirely empty—Mazazin having made no provision for the Queen's arrival, out of fear, perhaps, that her flight might become known. There are neither beds, furniture, nor linen. There is not a servant or attendant of any kind but such as have accompanied them. When it is night the Queen lies down to rest on a little

camp bedstead. The King and his brother fare no better. Mademoiselle is accommodated with a straw mattress in a magnificent saloon on the third floor. There were plenty of mirrors and much gilding, and the windows were lofty, and commanded an extensive view, but there is not a single pane of glass in one of them! No one has a change of linen. What was worn by night was washed by day. The Queen laughs at everything. She says—"It is an escapade which will last three days at the very utmost; when the citizens find that the Court has left the Palais Royal they will speedily come to their senses."

CHAPTER LI.

THE LADIES' WAR.

WHEN the citizens of Paris found that the Court had left the Palais Royal, instead of coming to their senses, they were furious. The Coadjutor, who had broken with the Regent, ruled supreme. He skilfully availed himself of the crisis, and caused the parliament to pass the act against aliens. This measure outlawed Mazarin as an enemy of the King and of the State, a conspirator, a perjurer, and a thief; confiscated his possessions, and enjoined all faithful subjects to shoot him without trial.

Civil war breaks out. The troops of the Queen-Regent were but feebly attacked. It was the *hearts* of her generals that were vigorously assailed by the lady commandants of the Fronde, whose artillery was blandishments and enticements.

Every soul in Paris armed himself, and took the

field in whatever costume he usually wore. The nobles led the way in feathered hats, satin doublets, silk stockings, and high-heeled boots. No one knew what they were fighting for. The cry was, "*Vive la Fronde!*" "*Mort à Mazarin!*"

The Duchesse de Longueville, supported by her brother, the great Condé, took possession of the executive government at the Hôtel de Ville. She was quickly joined by the Duchesses de Chevreuse and De Montbazon. The Duc de Beaufort was set at liberty. But as it was quite a "Ladies' War," he acted only as subordinate. The Duchesses distributed all the military posts and honours among themselves — they created themselves generals, lieutenants, and colonels, all so many Bellonas of revolt. War was waged on quite a new principle: Maréchal d'Hocquincourt, defending Peronne for the Queen-Regent, assured the Duchesse de Montbazon, who invested it for the Fronde, "That Peronne was at the service of the fairest of the fair."

Not so *la Grande Mademoiselle.* She ranged herself on the popular side against the Court, and commanded at the Bastille. She fought in good earnest, and pointed the well-loaded guns of that fortress against her King and cousin, who, with his

army, lay encamped without the walls of Paris. Louis retreated precipitately to Saint-Denis.

We are in the Hôtel de Ville, within the apartment of one of the very prettiest aides-de-camp attached to the Duchesse de Longueville. This fair lady, Mademoiselle de Rosny, has just finished a most elaborate toilette, and having arranged the innumerable little curls (then so much in vogue) round her face, and fastened the proper quantity of ribbon in her dark locks, takes a last fond look in the glass, and then seats herself in the happiest possible state of expectation. Now there is a certain all-conquering beau—Monsieur d'Aumale by name—who has more than half achieved the conquest of her heart; and she has a kind of presentiment that the morning will not pass without a visit from this pearl of cavaliers. Nor is she mistaken: a soft knock at the door announces the approach of some one. How her heart beats! It must be M. d'Aumale, so she says, "*Entrez!*" in a trembling voice, and d'Aumale stands before her.

"Mademoiselle de Rosny," he exclaims, "I am in the utmost haste, I am come to beg you to be present at the most singular spectacle you ever beheld."

"What may it be?" replies she, rather chagrined

that instead of a tender love-scene, such as she anticipated, M. d'Aumale seems so preoccupied.

"It is a review, mademoiselle, ordered by the council; but, ha! ha! such a review! *Morbleu*, you will never guess of whom—the oddest idea! It is no other than a review of priests, monks, and seminarists, sword in hand, and ready to charge the enemy. It is the strangest idea of defence that ever was conceived; but as we have lady-generals, and the grande Mademoiselle for chief, we are now to have an army of priests for them to command. These recruits are actually now all assembling on the bridge near Notre-Dame. You must be quick."

"Was ever anything so ridiculous!" and Mademoiselle de Rosny laughs. "But I shall be terrified at their awkwardness; they will be sure to fire too low and hit us."

"Oh, but you must come. I will be your guard; I pledge myself that you shall return uninjured," and d'Aumale gives the lady a tender glance. "Besides, to reassure you, I believe that these monk-warriors are not even to be trusted with matches; the arquebuses and cannon are as empty and as innocent as when in the arsenal; so there is nothing to fear. If you will come, I will conduct

you in my new coach—the very model of elegance —I will answer for it there is not such another in all Paris."

"That will be delightful!" cries the lady. "I do admire those new coaches so much, if it were not for this abominable war, I suppose they would become universal. Well, Monsieur d'Aumale, I am ready! let us see these monks; it will be a good story with which to entertain Madame la Duchesse de Longueville this evening at her reception. How the Duc de Beaufort will laugh!"

In high glee Mademoiselle de Rosny departed, accompanied by her admirer, her pleasure not a little heightened by the idea of appearing in a coach, then by no means common in Paris, and reserved generally for royalty, or for grand occasions, or state processions—heavy lumbering vehicles, such as figure in the old prints of that period, with a sloping roof like a house, and drawn by Flemish horses of huge dimensions. On arriving near the bridge, they stop under the shadow of the cathedral, and there behold the most extraordinary spectacle. All the young monks in Paris are crowded near Notre-Dame, with the exception of the Benedictines and some other orders, who refused to take any part in this mummery. At least fifteen hundred eccle-

siastics, drawn up in excellent order, are executing the various manœuvres of march, halt, right-about face, &c., with tolerable precision. The greater number have fastened up their black robes, and invested their lower limbs with most uncanonical garments. The reverend fathers, with their hoods hanging over their shoulders, are booted and spurred, many wear helmets and cuirasses, and all carry such halberts, lances, swords, and bucklers as they had been able to lay hands on. Others grasp a crucifix in one hand, and in the other a pistol, a scythe, an old dagger or a knife, with which each intends to perform prodigies of valour against the enemies of the Fronde. As they advance and retreat on the dusty soil in lines and columns, they present the appearance of an immense flight of crows hovering over a field of newly cut wheat.

To this martial array is added the clamour of drums, trumpets, and warlike instruments, accompanied with no end of benedictions, *Oremus*, and chanted psalms. At the head of the troops is a bishop, metamorphosed into a commandant. He moves very slowly, by reason of his corpulence and the weight of the armour he wears, and looks like a dilapidated St. George, minus the dragon. Then

come Carthusians, Begging Friars, Capuchins, and Seminarists, each different order commanded by their abbot or prior, advancing gravely in the orthodox goose-step. Cries of "Down with the Regent!" "Death to Mazarin!" "*A bas* the Italian beggar!" "Long live the Union!" "*Vive la Duchesse!*" "*Vive la Fronde!*" add to the clamour of the martial music. Mademoiselle de Rosny is fain to hold her ears, notwithstanding all the sweet things her companion is whispering. The mob of Paris *en masse* is assembled to witness this extraordinary review, and to rejoice in the unexpected aid contributed by the Church in the general emergency. Nor is M. d'Aumale's the only coach on the Quai Notre-Dame that day; many other possessors of such vehicles have been attracted by the scene. The Legate is among the number. The crowd is immense, the applause enthusiastic.

"*Ciel!*" calls out Mademoiselle de Rosny, on a sudden. "Look—do look! Monsieur d'Aumale, you have deceived me, I am sure. They are going to fire!"

"No, no," replies d'Aumale, "believe me, you are mistaken. 'Give the monk his rosary, the soldier his sword,' says the motto. *Messieurs les*

moines will not venture to burn their hands in attempting to handle firearms."

"But I tell you," cries the lady, "they are going to fire! Good heavens, the guns are all turned this way! Oh, d'Aumale, we shall be murdered. Help! help! I implore you!" And she catches hold of him, and begins to scream after the most approved fashion preparatory to a fit of hysterics.

D'Aumale looks out of the window. "In the name of heaven, beware—beware!" he shouts to the priests. But in the confusion his voice is inaudible. The ecclesiastical artillerymen, awkward and inexperienced, have already lighted the matches, and the cannon, which were loaded, explode right and left in the crowd. A fearful cry arises from the Legate's coach.

"Thank Heaven, d'Aumale, we have escaped,—this time at least," gasps Mademoiselle de Rosny in a low voice, for she is now calmed by excessive fear.

"Yes, but I fancy some one has been seriously wounded. I will alight and see," says d'Aumale, unfastening the door.

A dense crowd surrounds the coach belonging to the Legate. The secretary of his eminence had

been shot dead by a bullet through the chest, the Legate's confessor is wounded in the head, and his two valets also much injured. Never was there such confusion. M. d'Aumale hastens back to secure the safe retreat of the fair De Rosny. They are soon disengaged from the crowd, and rolling back over the muddy ground to the Hôtel de Ville. Here we must bid them farewell, assuming that mademoiselle soon secured the possession of the much-admired coach by a speedy marriage with its handsome owner.

CHAPTER LII.

MAZARIN PLAYED OUT.

THE marriage bells peal merrily for the august espousals of Louis XIV. with the Infanta Maria Theresa, daughter of the King of Spain. The troubles of the Fronde are over. Gondi, the Coadjutor, now Cardinal de Retz, is imprisoned. Cardinal Mazarin has cemented a peace between France and Spain. He has triumphed.

Mazarin left Paris with a great retinue of coaches, litters, and mules, attended by bishops, secretaries, lawyers, and priests, to meet the Spanish ambassador, Don Luis da Haro, on the frontier, there to arrange the preliminaries of the treaty and the marriage. Don Luis had already arrived, attended with equal splendour. A whole month was lost in the all-important question of precedence. Should Mazarin call on Da Haro, or Da Haro "drop in" on Mazarin? This momentous point was never settled. Mazarin, the wily Italian

—*Il Signor Faquino*, as the Prince de Condé calls him—took to his bed, hoping that the anxiety felt for his health by Da Haro would induce him to pocket his Castilian dignity and make the first advance. But Da Haro was not to be caught, and obstinately shut himself up, ate, drank, and made merry with the most dogged patience, and the most entire want of sympathy. So it ended in this wise—no visit was made at all. The great plenipotentiaries met, quite unofficially, on the Island of Pheasants, in the middle of the River Bidassoa, dividing France and Spain. There the real business was very soon dispatched. In process of time, the King and the Infanta were married.

The Infanta was very small, fair, and plump. There was an utter absence of expression in her freshly complexioned face; her eyes were large and gentle, but said absolutely nothing of any soul within. Her mouth was large, her teeth were irregular. Her dress horrified the French ladies. It was unanimously voted tawdry, ill-made, and unbecoming. As to the ladies in attendance on her, it was not possible to find words to paint their grotesqueness. They were black-skinned, scraggy, and awkward. They had hideous lace, and wore enormous farthingales. One of them,

the "governess of the Infanta," is gibbeted in the pages of history as "a monster." She unhappily wore what are designated as "*barrels*" under her dress. Such was the first effect of *crinoline* on the ladies of the French nation.

The Duchesse de Noailles was appointed lady of the bed chamber to the new Queen. She was recommended to this office by the Queen-dowager, Anne of Austria, her aunt.

Cardinal Mazarin has now reached the summit of power. He has imprisoned his rival Cardinal De Retz, and has tranquillised a great nation. He has even received the solemn thanks of the once turbulent parliament. He has equalled, if not exceeded, the renown of Richelieu. After the sounding of those marriage bells he returns to Paris, to repose upon his laurels. See him! the artistic egotist, who all his life has fed on the choicest grapes from his neighbour's vine, and sipped the most fragrant honey from flowers not his own. See him within his magnificent palace, the outward and visible evidence of the enormous wealth which he no longer fears to display. Louis XIV. looks on him as a father. Anne of Austria trembles when he frowns. All France is subservient to his rule. The walls of his chamber

are lined with artistic plunder:—pictures set in gorgeous frames of Florentine carving; statues, mirrors, and glittering chandeliers; tables and consoles, bearing ornaments of inestimable value, in marble, bronze, porcelain, pottery, enamel, and gems. Richest hangings of tapestry, and brocaded satin and velvet, more costly than the gold which surrounds them, shade the intrusive sunshine, and tone all down to that delicious half light so dear to the artistic sense. Everything has been arranged by the hand of a master; and there he sits, this master, dying. The seeds of disease, sown on the frontier where he was detained by Da Haro, have developed into a mortal malady.

He has just risen from his bed. He sits in a chair on wheels, in which he is rolled from frescoed gallery to marble vestibule; from corridors of pictures to precious libraries; from dainty retiring-rooms to painted pavilions, from guard-room to saloon—those superb saloons where he received the Court.

He even penetrates to the stables, and surveys his priceless stud; he ventures into the magnificent gardens which surround his palace, to feast his eyes on all his vast possessions. Returning again, greatly fatigued, to the picture-gallery, he

bids his attendants pause. He rests, absorbed in thought, under a Holy Family, by Raphael, a work beyond price, now in the Louvre. Here he desires his attendants to leave him; his secretary, who is never beyond call, he commands to wait his pleasure in the ante-room, behind the thick silken hangings that veil the door. Inadvertently this door is left ajar, and the secretary, curious to know what his master is doing, looks through a chink in the curtain, and watches him. The Cardinal, when he has glanced round carefully —to be sure he is alone—lays hold of a crutch placed ready to his hand, and with the utmost difficulty struggles to his feet, for they are swollen, and almost useless from gout. After many efforts he disengages himself from the chair, and reaches the ground, then, balancing himself upon the crutch and any object near at hand, he moves a few steps, stopping for lack of breath. (The secretary doubts if he should not rush in before he falls, so uncertain and tottering are Mazarin's movements; but he forbears, fearful of angering the Cardinal, whom suffering has made irritable.)

Mazarin sighs deeply as he limps on from picture to picture, and surveys his favourite works.

"I feel better," he says, speaking aloud. "If

I could only get my breath, I should recover. *Diamine!* I shall—I will recover. I cannot leave my pictures—such a collection,"—and he turns round with difficulty, and surveys the galleries—"not yet complete—to pass into other hands. No, no—it cannot be; I feel stronger already. I—alone in my gallery—without those spies always about me to see my weakness—I can breathe." And he draws a long breath. The long breath ends in a groan. "That divine Raffaello!" and again he sighs, and turns to the gem of his collection, a Nativity. "Raffaello is my religion. *Credo in Raffaello!* What *anima!* That exquisite Virgin! and the Christ nestling in her arms! I wonder who sat for that virgin? She must have been a perfect creature! I salute her *di cuore.* That picture came to me from the King of Spain—a bribe. Who cares? I never refuse a present. The King knows my taste. He sent me word there were many more to come if I concluded a peace. I did conclude a peace; I took that picture and others; but, *Sangue di Dio,* I was faithful to France. Ah, ha! I was too sharp for him—a dull king! That *torso* there, dug up at Portici—what stalwart limbs! what grand proportions! How finely the shadows fall upon the thigh from that

passing cloud. Ahi! my foot!" (and he shakes on his crutches so violently, the secretary's head and shoulders are inside the room, only the Cardinal does not see him). "I am better now," falters Mazarin, "much better;" then, taking a few steps onwards, he pauses before a Titian. "Venus, my Goddess!—*Laus Veneri.* Oh, the warmth of the flesh tints, the turn of that head and neck—divine! I gave a great price for that picture; but, *Cospetto!* it was not my own money," and he laughs feebly. "It will sell for double! That Paolo Veronese and that Tintoretto yonder came from the sale of Charles I. of England, after his execution—those English ruffians! What supple forms, what classic features!—like my native Romans in the Imperial city, where the very beggars think themselves equal to kings; and so they are, *per Dio.* Glorious Italy! *Ah, cielo!*" and he creeps on to a favourite landscape by Caracci, lit, as it were, by the living sunshine of the south. "Ah, that sun—I feel it —wonderful! wonderful!—a gem of the eclectic school of Bologna, given to me by the Archbishop. Poor man, he was not, like me, satisfied with art—ha, ha!"—his laugh ends in a severe fit of coughing. "He liked nature. He could not stand inquiry. —I helped him. Oh, my foot!" (And he totters so

helplessly, that the secretary, watching him with curious eyes, again nearly rushes in; for if Mazarin dies his salary ceases.) Recovering, however, he steadies himself against the pedestal of a marble group just arrived from Rome, "Leda and the Swan." He drags himself with difficulty into the recess where it is placed, shifting his position, in order to catch the precise light in which to view the rounded limbs of the figure. "What grace, what *abandon*, in that female form!—a trifle *leste* for the gallery of a prelate—presented, too, by a lady—a woman of taste, above prejudices. No one has seen it. I must invite the Court—the Queen-mother will be scandalised. Ha, ha! the Queen-mother!" and he feebly winks, his laugh bringing on another fit of convulsive coughing. (The secretary is on the threshold.) "I must not die before I have disposed of my pictures," Marazin mutters, breathing again; "I cannot bear to die!—now, too, that I have triumphed over all my enemies." The Cardinal sighs heavily, shakes his head, and casts a longing glance round the painted walls. He tries to move onwards; but his strength fails him, suddenly his hands are cramped, the crutch falls on the floor, he groans, sinks into a chair, and faintly calls for assistance.

The secretary is with him in an instant, and summons the attendants. Weary, and utterly exhausted, they lay him on his bed, where he sighs and groans, as much from anguish of mind as from bodily pain. He feels that nothing can amuse or delight him more, neither singing men nor singing women, the wonders of art or the flattery of Courts. From henceforth to him the world must evermore be mute; the flowers in the gardens he has created shall no longer fling their scented blossoms at his feet; to him the birds are dumb in the groves he has planted, the fruits cease to be luscious, and the sun is already darkened by the shadow of death. His face turns of an ashy hue, and he feebly calls for his physician.

One of the many attendants that hover about his bed, each one hoping to be remembered in that will of his, of which all Paris has heard, flies to fetch him. He appears in the person of Guénaud, the Court doctor of that day.

Mazarin has revived a little. He is propped up on pillows, to relieve his breathing, which, by reason of the oppression on his chest, is laboured and difficult. At the sight of Guénaud he trembles; his teeth chatter. He has summoned the leech, and now he dares not hear what he has to

say. Mazarin, with his sensuous Italian temperament, clings wildly to life. He shrinks from the dark horrors of the grave—he, who adores sunshine, warmth, open air, and beauty.

"Well, Guénaud, well. You are in haste to come to me."

"Your eminence sent for me," replies the physician gravely, bowing to the ground; then he contemplates the Cardinal with that all-seeing eye for obvious symptoms and for remote details, that makes the glance of a doctor so awful to the sick.

"I—I am better, Guénaud—much better, *now*; I had fatigued myself among my pictures. But I did much, Guénaud—I did *too* much. I even crawled to my stables — to my garden; I am gaining strength. To-morrow——"

Mazarin stops; a severe fit of coughing almost suffocates him. Again the ashy hue—grey as the shadows of departing day when the sun has set—overcasts his features. Guénaud does not reply, but still contemplates his patient attentively. The Cardinal looks up; a hectic colour flushes his cheeks.

"Come," says he, "speak; be honest with me. I am better?" Guénaud bows.

"I trust so," replies he.

"*Sangue di Dio!*"—and the Cardinal grows crim-

son, and clenches his thin fingers with nervous agony—"speak. Your silence agitates me. What have you to tell me? How long have I to live? Shall I recover?"

Guénaud shakes his head. Mazarin's face again becomes suddenly deadly pale. He leans back on his pillows, and sniffs a strong essence in a filigree bottle lying by his side. "Guénaud," says he, "I dread death, but I am no coward. I am prepared for the worst."

"I rejoice to hear it," answers the physician solemnly, feeling his pulse. "You will have need of all your fortitude."

"Is it so? Well, then, let me hear my fate?"

"Your eminence cannot live long. Nothing can save you."

A strange look of determination comes into the Cardinal's eyes as Guénaud speaks. Mazarin was, as he said, no coward; but the flesh was weaker than the spirit, and shrank from suffering and disease. Now that he has heard the truth, he bears it better than would appear possible in one so slight, nervous, and attenuated.

"I cannot flatter your eminence," continues Guénaud, "your disease is incurable; but I admit that remedies may prolong your life, though they

cannot preserve it. Remedies, ably administered, can do much, even in fatal cases."

"I respect your frankness, doctor," says the Cardinal calmly. "Speak out; how long can I last?"

"Your eminence may hope to live for two months, perhaps, by following the rules I shall prescribe."

"Well, well—two months! Ah, it is a short time,"—and a nervous spasm passes over his face, and his hands twitch with a convulsive spasm. "I do not die of old age; I have sacrificed my life to France and to the King. I never got over that negotiation at the Pyrenees. Well, well — so best. At least, I know my fate. This interval must be consecrated to the care of my soul. Two months! I shall do my best. All my brother prelates will assist me——"

"To live, your eminence?"

"No, no, Guénaud,"—and the shadow of a smile passes over his thin white lips,—"no, no, not to live, but to die; to die for the sake of the abbeys, bishoprics, and canonries my death will leave vacant. In two months one may have a world of indulgences; that is something. The Holy Father will rejoice at having my patronage; he

is sure to give me a helping hand; and plenty of indulgences. I stand well with the Pope, Guénaud. But—but my pictures, my statues—a collection I have been making all my life, at such a vast expense. Who knows, Guénaud? you may be mistaken," he added, brightening up, his mercurial nature rushing back into its accustomed channel at the recollection of what had been the passion of his life. "Who knows, I may get better!" and his eye turns sharply upon the physician, with a sparkle of its accustomed fire; "eh, Guénaud—who knows?" Guénaud bows, but is silent. "You may be mistaken. *Non importa*, I must think of my soul. It is indeed a great trial—a sore trial—a man of my age, too, with so many years to live! and such a collection! You know my collection, Guénaud?"

"Yes, your eminence," answers he, bowing.

"The finest in Europe," sighs Mazarin, "and not yet finished; fresh works coming in daily. A great trial—but I must think of my soul. Go now, Guénaud; come again to-morrow. Perhaps—who knows?—you may see some change, some improvement—who knows?"

Guénaud shakes his head silently, and withdraws.

Meanwhile the Queen-mother, Anne of Austria,

informed of Mazarin's desperate condition, hastens to visit him. She is attended by her gossiping ladies, eager to catch every word, and—amidst nods and winks, and sighs of affected sympathy—to comment on her sorrowful expression.

Her Majesty is pale and sad; tears gather in her eyes as she advances towards the bed on which Mazarin lies, and she asks with a timid yet tender voice after his health. He replies that he is very ill, and repeats to her what Guénaud had told him. If I were to add that he displayed to the Queen and her ladies one of his bare legs, to afford ocular demonstration of his reduced condition, I fear I should be accused of imitating the *mauvaise langue* of Madame de Noailles. But he really did so, to the great grief of Anne of Austria, and to the utter discomfiture and horror of her less sympathizing ladies in waiting, who rapidly retreat into the recesses of the windows, or behind the draperies of the apartment, to escape so unpleasant a spectacle.

"Look!" exclaims Mazarin, thrusting forward his leg—"look, Madame, at the deplorable condition to which I am reduced by my incessant anxiety for the welfare of France! And to leave my pictures too, —my statues. Ah, Madame, it is a bitter trial!"

Soon after this extraordinary interview, and

when all the world believed Mazarin to be dead or dying, the cunning Italian, determined once more to take in the whole Court, and deceitful in his death as he had been in his life, gave orders that his convalescence should be announced. He caused himself to be painted white and red, dressed in his ecclesiastical robes, and placed in a sedan chair with all the glasses down. In this disguise he was wheeled along the broad terraces of his garden, taking care to be well observed by the vast crowd collected by the news of his recovery. For a moment he presented the appearance of health and vigour. But the effort he had forced himself to make, in order to enact this ghastly comedy, was too much for his remaining strength. He swooned in his sedan chair, and was brought back and placed on his bed, never to rise again. Thus died as he had lived, Cardinal Mazarin, a dissembler and a hypocrite; but a great minister. Not cruel or bloodthirsty, like Richelieu, yet equally unscrupulous, Mazarin gained the end he had in view by patience, cunning, and intrigue. At his death he left France, already exhausted by the wars of the Fronde, completely subdued; and in such a state of abject submission to the Government, as paved the way to the extravagance and oppression of Louis XIV.'s reign.

CHAPTER LIII.

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

The young King Louis XIV. was active, vigorous, and graceful. He excelled in outward accomplishments, in riding, dancing, and fencing; but intellectually he was both idle and ignorant. His education had been purposely neglected by Cardinal Mazarin; and he was so fully aware of it, that he carefully avoided displaying his ignorance by a too facile or rapid address. Even in youth he was grave and ceremonious; in later years he became pompous and overbearing On the other hand, the refinement of his mother's nature was reproduced in the son of her love. He was brought up by her side in a circle as elegant and refined as the Hôtel de Rambouillet in its palmiest days. He never forgot the lesson he then learnt, that the outward proprieties of life must be studiously observed, whatever freedoms may be permitted in private. He desired all his life to

be considered pious, just, and moral. He failed in each, for his passions were strong and his temper was imperious. The vicissitudes of his early life during the civil wars of the Fronde, when he was often obliged to fly at a moment's notice from place to place, gave him, however, a power of assuming calmness and dignity under all circumstances, which he could never have acquired in less eventful times.

Above all sovereigns Louis understood the art of reigning, of appearing to be a great king when he was really but a shallow, vain, irresolute man, extraordinarily accessible to flattery. Yet that a son of Louis XIII. should say with truth, "*L'état c'est moi*," and dare to drive out the national Parliament solemnly assembled in the legislative chamber, *whip in hand*, is one of the most striking anomalies in history.

In person Louis resembled his father. He was dark, broad shouldered, and rather short, with regular features and a prominent nose. But he had all the fire of his mother's Spanish eyes, and withal the grandest manners and the most royal presence ever seen. From a boy he was an ardent admirer of the fair, and continued to be secretly ruled, all his life, by female influence. Indeed,

his long reign may be divided into three periods, corresponding with the characteristics of the three women who successively possessed all the love he could spare from himself. He was gentle, humane, and domestic with La Vallière; arrogant, heartless, and warlike with De Montespan; selfish, bigoted, and cruel, with De Maintenon.

His boyish philandering with the handsome nieces of Cardinal Mazarin has been already noticed. What subtle plans developed themselves in the brain of that unscrupulous schemer never can be known; but he could not have arranged matters better to place one of his nieces on the throne of France. Nor to his Italian notions would this have been extraordinary. Mazarin would have argued that a Mancini was as well born as a Medici, whose arms were a pill-box, and that Martinozzi was as ancient a name as Bourbon.

Anne of Austria looked on with displeasure. Mazarin wore an imperturbable front, a sphinx-look, ready to answer either way, as circumstances might prompt. By the time that Maria Mancini came from Rome, Louis's passions were thoroughly roused. The young lion had tasted blood, and found it pleasant to his palate. Maria was far less beautiful than her sisters,—indeed, that bitter-

tongued chronicler, Bussy Rabutin, calls her "ugly, fat, and short, with the air of a *soubrette;*" but she had the temper of an angel, and seemed to the boyish Louis a soft, plaintive, clinging creature, who appealed to his pity. In reality she had a force of character ten times greater than his own, and the courage of a heroine.

In Maria Mancini, Mazarin made his great move in the matrimonial game. Louis gave signs of a serious attachment. Anne of Austria set a watch upon him. It was needful. Louis had a temperament of fire, Maria was born under an Italian sky. Notwithstanding the watch set Louis found opportunity to promise marriage to Maria. He repeated this promise with protestations and oaths, but, cautious even in his youth, he did not, like his grandfather Henry IV., commit it to writing.

Mazarin, informed by his niece of what had passed, opined that the time to speak had come. He ventured to sound the Queen-mother. He spoke of the charms of genuine attachment, the happiness of domestic life on a throne; he hinted at the Queen's own unhappy career, sacrificed as she had been to a political alliance. He enlarged on the antiquity of the Latin races, specially those

of Rome and Sicily, "all of them," he said, "once reigning houses, and poverty," he added, "did not make blue blood red."

The Queen, however subservient to the Cardinal on all other matters, flared out—"If ever my son condescends to marry your niece," cried she, "I will disown him. I will place myself, with his brother, Philip of Orleans, at the head of the nation, and fight against him and you, Cardinal Mazarin."

The Cardinal had many consolations; he was fain to yield. Maria was sent to a convent. Poor Maria—to go to Brouage instead of sitting on a throne! It was very hard. Louis was in despair. When they met to say adieu, he wept.

"What, Sire!" she exclaimed; "you love me—you weep—and we part?" and she turned her liquid eyes upon him with a look of passionate entreaty.

Perhaps the tears in the King's eyes blinded him, or he did not hear her; at all events, he heeded neither her look nor her inuendo, and she went.

Then those marriage bells sounded from over the frontier of which we have spoken. The King espoused the Infanta of Spain, and Maria Mancini became La Principessa Colonna, and lived at Naples.

* * * * * *

The Court is at Saint-Germain. Louis XIV. was born there, and until Versailles and Marly were built, he made it his principal residence. In one of the principal saloons, on the first floor, lying midway between the turreted angles of the façade, looking over the plain towards Paris, Louis XIII. ended his miserable existence, his private band playing a "De Profundis," of his own composition, during his death throes. His morbid nature—reproduced in his descendant, Louis XV., who said he loved "the scent of newly made graves"—made him await the approach of death with a sort of grim curiosity. As he lay on his bed, opposite the windows, his dim eyes resting on the wide expanse that stretched out below, he called Laporte to him. He was so near his end that he articulated with difficulty. "Remember, my good Laporte," he gasped, "that place, below there where the road turns under that rise,"—and he raised his bony finger, and pointed to a particular spot, on the road to Saint-Denis, along which his funeral procession must pass to reach the tombs of his ancestors—"that place there. It has been newly mended, Laporte. It is rough, and will shake me. Let the driver go gently over the stones. Be sure to tell him I said so."

This was not like his son, Louis XIV., who came to detest Saint-Germain because this very Cathedral of Saint-Denis, where he must be buried, was visible on the horizon line. Such an object did not suit a monarch who desired to be thought immortal.

The Court is at Saint-Germain. It is a cool, delicious evening, after a day of unusual heat. The summer evenings are always charming at Saint-Germain, by reason of the bowery freshness of the adjacent forest, from which cool breezes come rippling through the air, that fan the heated atmosphere. The sombre château is now a mass of deep shadow, save where the setting sun lights up some detail of its outline—an arched window, a rich cornice, a pillared portico, or a pointed tower, which stand out against the western sky with fugitive brightness. The parterre blazes with summer flowers, the perfume of which creeps upwards in the rising dews of evening. The formal gravel walks are bordered by statues and orange-trees, and the splashing of many fountains stirs the air. A flock of peacocks strut on the greensward, their long tails catching the last rays of the sunset. The summer birds make delicate music among the shrubberies; and the

giant elms, in the outer park, divided from the garden by an open iron railing, bow their rounded heads to the breeze.

When the sun has set, a merry party, consisting of four of the maids of honour, leave the château by a side door. They run swiftly along the terrace,—frightening the peacocks, who drop their tails and fly screeching into the trees,—and ensconce themselves in a trellised arbour, garlanded with honeysuckles and roses, hid in a thicket of flowery shrubs skirting one side of the parterre. Once there, their tongues are let loose like so many cherry-clappers.

It was so nearly dark that the maids of honour did not notice the King as they scudded along the garden, who, attended by the mischief-loving Comte de Lauzun, had also stolen out to enjoy the evening. Louis watched them as they ran, and then, hearing their voices in such eager talk, was seized with intense desire to know who they were, and what they were saying. He dare not speak, for they would hear him, and perhaps recognise his voice. Signing to his confidant Lauzun to follow him, he softly approached the arbour in which the four girls are hid.

He finds that they are all talking about a fancy

ball given the night before by Madame Henrietta, Duchesse d'Orléans, his brother's wife; and particularly about a ballet in which he himself had danced. The King and Lauzun, favoured by the increasing darkness of the night, and well entrenched behind the shrubs, lose not a syllable.

The question is, which dancer was the handsomest and the most graceful? Each pretty lady has, of course, her own predilection. One declares for the Marquis d'Alençon, another will not hear of any comparison with M. de Vardes, a third stoutly maintains that the Comte de Guiche was by far the handsomest man there and everywhere else (an opinion which, *par parenthèse*, Madame herself takes every opportunity of showing she endorses, displaying, moreover, this opinion somewhat too openly, notwithstanding her designs on the heart of the King himself, whom she fancies, and others declare, is, or has been, her admirer). The fourth damsel is silent. Called upon to give her opinion, she speaks, and in the sweetest and gentlest of voices she thus expresses herself:—

"I cannot imagine how any one could have been even noticed when the King was present. He is quite fascinating."

"Ah, then, mademoiselle, you declare for the King. What will Madame say to you?"

"No, it is not the King nor the crown he wears that I admire; it is not his rank that makes him so charming: on the contrary, to me it is rather a defect, for if he were not the King I should positively dread him. His position is my best safeguard. However——" And La Vallière drops her head on her bosom and falls into a deep reverie.

On hearing these words the King is strangely affected, he whispers to Lauzun not to mention their adventure; they retire silently as they came, and re-enter the château. The King is in a dilemma. If he could only discover who this fair damsel is who prefers him to all others with such naïveté —who admires him for himself alone, and not for his rank—a preference as flattering as it is rarely the lot of a monarch to discover! All he knows is that it must be one of the maids of honour attached to the service of Madame Henrietta, his sister-in-law, and he cannot sleep all night, he is so haunted with the melting tones of her voice, and so anxious to discover to whom it belongs.

In the morning, as soon as etiquette allowed of his appearing, Louis hurries off to the toilette of Madame, whom he finds seated before a mirror of the rarest Dresden china, looped up with lace

and ribbons, her face and shoulders covered with her long hair.

"Your Majesty honours me with an early visit," says she, colouring with pleasure as he enters. "What plans have you arranged for the hunt to-day? When are we to start?"

Louis, with his usual politeness—shown, be it recorded to his credit, towards any woman, whatever might be her degree—gallantly replies that it is for her to command and for him to obey. But there the conversation drops, and the Duchess observes that he is absent and preoccupied. This both chagrins and disappoints her. Piqued at his want of *empressement*, she turns from him abruptly and begins conversing with the Comte de Guiche, who with ill-disguised uneasiness had stood aloof watching her warm reception of his Majesty.

Henriette, the royal daughter of the Stuarts and the Bourbons, without being positively handsome, has the air of a great princess. The freshness of her complexion is, however, all that is English about her. Her forehead, high and broad, but too much developed for beauty, gives a certain grandeur to her expression; her eyes are sparkling, but placed too near together. Still her face is intelligent and lively. She is tall, slim, and

very graceful. Around her long neck, on which her small head is admirably set, is bound a single string of fine orient pearls, and a mantle and train of turquoise *faille* fall back from a flounced petticoat of yellow satin.

While Madame Henrietta talks with the Comte de Guiche, Louis is at liberty to use his eyes as he chooses, and he hastily surveys the group of lovely girls that stand behind the Princess's chair. One placed a little apart from the rest rivets his attention. Her pale and somewhat melancholy countenance imparts an indescribable air of interest to her appearance, and the graceful *tournure* of her head and neck add to her charms.

"Can this be she?" he asks himself. He hopes—he fears (he was young then, Louis, and not the *blasé débauché* he afterwards became)—he actually trembles with emotion, suspense, and impatience. But determined to ascertain the truth, and regardless of the furious glances cast at him by Madame,—who evidently neither likes nor understands his wandering looks, directed evidently to her ladies, and his total want of *empressement* towards herself,—he approaches the fair group and begins conversing with them, certain that if that same soft voice is heard that had never ceased to

echo in his ears, he shall at once recognise it. He speaks to Mademoiselle de Saint-Aignan, but his eyes are fixed on the pale face of La Vallière, for she it was whom he so much admired. La Vallière casts down her eyes and blushes.

The King advances towards her and addresses her. He awaits her reply with indescribable anxiety. She trembles, grows still more pale, then blushes crimson, and finally answers in a voice tremulous with timidity; but it was *the* voice! He has found her. This, then, is the unknown, and she loves him; her own lips confessed it. Delightful! He leaves the apartments of Madame abruptly in speechless ecstasy.

From that day he sees, he lives only for La Vallière. Ever in the apartments of his sister-in-law, it was evident even to her that he did not come to seek her, and her rage knew no bounds. She had hitherto had ample reason to believe that the attachment the King felt for her somewhat exceeded that of a brother. With the spiteful penetration of a jealous woman, she now discovers how often the eyes of Louis are fixed with admiration on the timid, downcast La Vallière. She is not, therefore, long in guessing the object of his preference, and the cause of his

frequent visits to her apartments. From this moment she hates poor Louise, and determines, if possible, to ruin her.

The King on his part, unconscious of the storm he was raising about La Vallière, is enchanted not only with herself, but with all he has heard of her character. She is beloved by every one; her goodness, sweetness, and sincerity are universally acknowledged, and the account of her various good qualities tend to enhance her merit.

When the Court returns to Saint-Germain (now, can one fancy romance within those dingy walls?—but so it was), Louis is desperately, head and ears over, in love. A party of pleasure is arranged to take place in the forest under a tent formed of boughs, tapestry, and flowers. The ladies invited to this sylvan retreat are habited as shepherdesses and peasants. They form charming groups, like Sèvres china. On their arrival the most delicious music is heard from the recesses of the leafy woods, which as it plays at intervals, now here, now there, among the trees, is the signal for the appearance of various groups of satyrs, fauns, and dryads, who after dancing grotesque figure-dances, and singing verses in honour of the King, disappear, to be quickly replaced by

another troupe, who present flowers, and also sing and dance as no dryads or fauns had ever dreamed of in classic bowers, but in a style quite peculiar to the age and taste of *le Grand Monarque*, who liked even nature itself to appear as artificial and formal as he was himself. This agreeable fête has lasted all day, and the company is about to return, when, conceive the alarm—a violent storm comes on, thunder rolls, the sky is suddenly overcast, and a heavy rain, enough to drench the whole Court to the skin, descends with remorseless violence. How every one scudds hither and thither! The thickest trees are eagerly seized on as a slight protection against the storm. Others hide themselves in the bushes, some penetrate deeper into the cover of the copse wood. Spite of the rain, and the destruction of the dresses, the ladies come to vote it rather an agreeable incident on the whole, when they find their favourite cavaliers beside them, placed, perchance, somewhat nearer than would have been *comme il faut* in the Court circle. For although the ladies might really at first have been a little terrified, the gentlemen are certainly not likely to be troubled with any nervousness on account of a thunderstorm, and preserve sufficient *sang-froid* each to select his lady-love in order to

protect her from the weather. Thus it chanced that Madame Henriette finds herself under the care of the Comte de Guiche; the fair Mancini, once beloved by the King, now Comtesse de Soissons, is under the protection of her dear De Vardes; and Mademoiselle d'Orléans—*la Grande Mademoiselle*—is completely happy, and forgets the thunder, rain, and, more wonderful still, her own dignity, at finding herself escorted by Lauzun!

The King, nowise behind his courtiers in gallantry, at once offers his escort and his arm to support La Vallière, who, naturally timid, is really frightened, and clings to him with a confidence that enchants him. All the world knows she is a little lame, a defect which was said in her to be almost a grace. On the present occasion she does not perhaps regret that this infirmity prevents her escaping as quickly as the rest, and thus prolongs the precious moments alone with the King. Louis places her under a tree, where they are both protected from the rain and shrouded by the thick boughs which hang low and fringe the grass.

The King seizes on this happy opportunity to declare his passion, and to acquaint La Vallière with the love she has inspired him ever since that evening, when he had overheard her. Poor Louise!

who had never dared to imagine that her love was returned, well-nigh faints as the King proceeds. Her heart beats so violently it is almost audible. She is actually on the point of rushing from under the tree, when the King laying hold of her hand, retains her.

"What!" cries he, "do you fear me more than the storm? What have I done to alarm you? you whom I love, whom I adore! Why do you hate me? Speak, I implore you, Louise."

"Oh, Sire! do not say hate. I revere you—I love you—as my King, but——"

"Sweet girl, I breathe again. But why only love me as your Sovereign—I, who cherish your every look, who seek only to be your servant—your slave?"

Saying this, Louis falls on his knees before her; he seizes her hands, which he covers with kisses; he swears he will never rise until she has promised to love him, and to pardon the terror his declaration has caused her.

Mademoiselle de la Vallière cannot control her emotion. She implores him to rise.

"You are my King," she says, "the husband of the Queen. My royal master, I am your faithful subject. Can I say more?"

"Yes, dearest, promise me your love. Give me your heart; that is the possession I desire," murmurs Louis.

Pressed by the King to grant him some mark of her favour, La Vallière becomes so confused she cannot reply. Louis grows more and more pressing, interpreting her emotion as favourable to his suit. In the midst of the tenderest entreaties the thunder again bursts forth, and poor Louise, overcome at once by fear, love, and remorse, swoons away. The King naturally receives the precious burden in his arms. He seeks hastily to rejoin the other fugitives and his attendants, in order to obtain assistance. Ever and anon he stops in the openings of the forest to admire her, as she lies calm and lovely in repose, her long eyelashes sweeping her delicate cheeks, her half-closed lips revealing the prettiest, and whitest teeth. I leave my readers to imagine if Louis did not imprint a few kisses on the fainting beauty he bears so carefully in his arms, and if now and then he did not press her beloved form closer to his breast. If in this he *did* take advantage of the situation chance had afforded him, he must be forgiven; he was young, and he was deeply in love.

Words cannot describe the surprise felt by La

Vallière on recovering to find herself alone, borne along in the King's arms, in the midst of a lonely forest. History does not, however, record that she died of terror, or that she even screamed; but perhaps, and indeed doubtless, she would have done so had not the respectful behaviour of the King reassured her.

The moment she opens her sweet blue eyes he stops, places her on the ground, and supports her in the tenderest manner. He assures her that being then near the edge of the forest, and not far distant from the château, they are sure to meet some of his attendants. Louise blushes, then grows pale, then blushes again, as the recollection of all the King had said to her while under the shade of the greenwood gradually returns to her remembrance. She reads the confirmation of it in his eyes. Those eyes are fixed on her with passionate ardour. Disengaging herself from his arms, she thanks him, in a faltering voice, for his care a thousand times—for his condescension. She is so sorry. It was so foolish to faint; but the thunder—his Majesty's goodness to her——. Here she pauses abruptly; her conscience tells her she ought at once to reject his suit; her lips cannot form the words.

While she is speaking, a group of horsemen

are visible in the distance, at the end of one of those long woodland glades which divide the forest. On hearing the voice of the King, who calls to them, they gallop rapidly towards them. The King and La Vallière reach the château shortly after the other ladies, none of whom, as it appeared, had been in haste to return.

From this moment La Vallière's fate is sealed. Long she had loved and admired the King in secret; but until she learnt how warmly he returned this feeling she was scarcely aware how completely he had enthralled her. The ecstasy this certainty gave her first fully revealed to her the real danger of her situation. Poor Louise! Is it wonderful that, as the scene of this first and passionate declaration, she should love the old Château of Saint-Germain more than any other spot in the world?—that when suffering, the air restored her? when unhappy (and she lived to be so miserable), the sight of the forest, of the terrace, revived her by tender reminiscences of the past?

When the secret of Louis's attachment to La Vallière transpired (which, after the scene in the forest was very speedily), nothing could exceed the indignation of the whole circle, who each

conceived that they had some especial cause of complaint.

Louis's old love, the Comtesse de Soissons (Mancini), with the thirst for practical revenge, bred in her hot Italian blood, held council with De Vardes and De Guiche, how to crush her, whom she styled "the common enemy." A letter was planned and written by her in Spanish, addressed to the Queen, purporting to come from the King of Spain. This letter detailed every particular of her husband's *liaison* with La Vallière. The bad spelling and foreign idioms, however, betrayed it to be a forgery.

The letter was placed on the Queen's bed by the Comtesse de Soissons herself. Instead of falling into the Queen's hands, as was intended, it was found by De Molena, Maria Theresa's Spanish nurse. She carried it straight to the King. He traced it to Madame de Soissons. She was banished.

Madame Henrietta d'Orléans was more noisy and abusive than any one. Her vanity was hurt. Her feelings were outraged at the notion that the King, heretofore her admirer, should forsake her openly for one of her own women! It was too insulting.

"What!" cried she in her rage, "prefer an

ugly, limping *fillette* to *me*, the daughter of a king? I am as superior in beauty to that little minx as I am in birth! *Dieu! qu'il manque de goût et de délicatesse!*" Without even taking leave of Louis she shut herself up at Saint-Cloud, where she made the very walls ring with her complaints.

The poor, quiet little Queen, the only really injured person, wept and mourned in private. She was far too much afraid of that living Jupiter Tonans, her husband, to venture on any personal reproaches. She consoled herself by soundly abusing La Vallière in epithets much more expressive than polite.

In this abuse she was joined by Anne of Austria, who, in her present austere frame of mind, was the last person in France to spare La Vallière.

An explanation was decidedly needful.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE CONVENT OF CHAILLOT.

Mademoiselle de la Valliere is summoned to the presence of the Queen-mother. She is sitting in the Grey Chamber, adjacent to her oratory. Louise is aware that Anne of Austria never gives audiences in the Grey Chamber except on the most serious occasions. The Queen-mother wears a dark dress, in cut and shape like the robe of a nun; her grey hair is gathered into a head-dress of white lace, and she carries a rosary at her side. She looks old and sad; her stately form is bent, her face is thin, her features are drawn, and wrinkles obscure her once brilliant eyes.

The Duchesse d'Orléans is seated by her side. Louise enters. She dares not advance beyond the door. Standing there she makes deep obeisances to the Queen-mother and to Madame Henrietta. She blushes scarlet, then turns pale. Her head drops

on her bosom; as she stands before them she feels more dead than alive.

"I see you are there, Mademoiselle de la Vallière," says the Queen, frowning. "I wish to speak to you in the presence of your late mistress, Madame Henrietta de France, my daughter-in-law. You are aware why we have sent for you?"

"No, Madame," answers the maid of honour faintly, "but I humbly await your orders."

"What affected humility!" exclaims Madame Henrietta with a sneer. "You act uncommonly well, *petite*."

"All the better if she be humble, my daughter," rejoins the Queen-mother, speaking of La Vallière as if she were not present—"all the better. It is some step towards repentance that she is conscious of her crime. It will save us the trouble of insisting on it. Pray to God, mademoiselle, to pardon you; you have no hope but in heaven." And she casts a stern glance at her.

The tears gather in La Vallière's soft blue eyes. They course each other down her pallid cheeks, and fall, spotting her pale blue dress. Her head, covered with a profusion of short fair curls, is still bent down. She looks like a delicate flower bowed before a cruel tempest.

"What are you going to do with those fine diamond bracelets the King presented to you the other day out of the Queen's lottery?" asks Madame Henrietta tauntingly, interrupting the Queen.

Anne of Austria makes a sign to her to be silent. Poor Louise for an instant turns her eyes imploringly upon her. Madame grows pale with spite as she remembers those superb diamond bracelets that the King drew as a prize from the lottery,—which she had fully expected he would present to herself,—were given by him to La Vallière. She is so wrath she cannot leave Louise alone; again she attacks her. "Your vanity is insufferable, mademoiselle. Do you imagine, *petite sotte*, that any one cares for *you?* Mademoiselle de Pons is the belle of the Court. His Majesty says so."

At this malicious stab Louise shudders.

"My daughter," interposes the Queen-mother, "do not agitate yourself. I understand your annoyance at having introduced such a person as Mademoiselle de la Vallière at Court. Let *me* address her. She is unworthy of your notice. You understand, of course, mademoiselle, that you are dismissed," she says, turning towards her and speaking imperiously.

"But, your Majesty—" and La Vallière's stream-

ing eyes are again lifted upwards for an instant—"what, oh what have I done?"

"Ask yourself, mademoiselle. Unless there are to be two queens of France, you must go. You cannot wish me, the mother of his Majesty, to enter into details on a subject so painful to my feelings."

"No, I should think not," breaks in Madame Henrietta, "unless you have no sense of decency. A little unworthy chit like you to dare to trouble royal princesses; you are as impertinent as you are disreputable."

At these cruel words La Vallière staggers backwards, and almost falls. Then she again turns her swollen eyes towards the royal ladies with absolute terror.

Ah, heaven! she thinks, if the King did but know her agony, her sufferings! Ah, if he were but here to speak for her! But not a word passes her lips.

Madame Henrietta's eyes fix themselves on her with a look of triumph. She becomes absolutely radiant at the sight of the humiliation of her whom she calls "her rival."

"You know our pleasure, mademoiselle," says Anne of Austria, rising from her arm-chair. "You

will return from whence you came—Touraine, I believe. You will be conducted by Madame de Choisy; but, indeed, you need no escort; you have nothing to fear *now*," and the Queen-mother casts a look of withering contempt on the wretched girl more offensive even than her bitter words.

Louise shrinks backwards. She would fain escape.

"Do not forget, mademoiselle, before you go, to thank Madame Henrietta de France for all her goodness to you," says the Queen, arresting her with a motion—"goodness, indeed, you have so ill requited."

"No, no!" cries Henrietta; "I want no thanks. I only want to be rid of her. Let her go, my mother; I ask no more."

The two Princesses rise together. They both deliberately turn their backs upon La Vallière, and leave the room. For some moments she stands as if turned into stone. Then she gives a wild scream, raises her small hands, and clutches the delicate curls that hang about her face, and rushes from "the Grey Chamber."

"Dishonoured—banished! Ah, God! what will become of me?" she cries distractedly when she has locked herself in her own room. "Ah! what

will my mother say when she knows all? Holy Virgin, I am lost!"

She paces up and down the floor—she sobs, she moans. Everything about her reminds her of the King. She handles the presents he has given her; she takes out his letters; she kisses them; she presses them to her bosom. She tries to collect her thoughts, but the murmur of the night wind, sweeping over the trees in the adjacent forest and whistling round the angles of the palace, catches her ear. To her excited imagination it wails lamentations over her fate. As she listens she seems to hear her mother's voice reproaching her. Now as the blast rises higher and higher it is her father, who curses her in the tempest that sweeps by. Trembling in every limb she rises and dashes the glittering baubles she still holds in her hands to the ground. Her head reels, her reason totters, until fresh sobs and fresh torrents of tears come to her relief. Suddenly the same idea, in the same place, rushes into her mind as had struck Louise de Lafayette, yet under widely different circumstances. Louise de Lafayette, a creature so pure, so angelic as to start back dismayed from the faintest whisper of a too ardent love—she, Louise de la Vallière, held up to public contumely, dismissed the Court!

She must fly; she must never be heard of more. She can never return home. A convent must hide her. "God alone and the blessed saints are left to me!" she cries; "wretch that I am, let me seek them where they may be found."

As soon as the grey morning comes creeping into her room, lighting up her white face and crushed figure, as she leans back in the chair where she has sat immovable all the live-long night, she rises, and puts together a little bundle of necessaries. She covers herself with a cloak, and softly opening her door, makes her way down the nearest flight of stairs. No one sees her, for the day is only dawning. She glides swiftly out of the palace, passes the gate, where the sentinel is sleeping at his post, and finds herself in the street of the little town of Saint-Germain. Her heart beats so quickly, and her steps are so rapid, that she is soon obliged to stop for want of breath. Not knowing where to go, she leans against the corner of a house. She strains her eyes up and down the street in every direction, but sees no one of whom she can ask her way. At last, at the bottom of the *grande rue*, a country-woman appears, carrying a basket on her arm, on her way to market. Louise flies towards her. The

woman stares at her. La Vallière's lips move, but she has no breath to speak.

"God speed you, pretty lady. Where are you going so early?" asks the peasant.

"*Ma bonne*," at last answers La Vallière, when she has recovered her breath, "can you tell me the way to Chaillot? I want to go to the convent."

Now, Chaillot was a convent founded by Henrietta Maria, Queen of England, situated between Saint-Germain and Paris, no vestige of which now remains.

"Surely, *belle dame*, I can tell you. Come with me, I am going that way," and the woman stares at her again. "Why are you out so early? Are you from the palace?"

"No, no!" gasps La Vallière, terrified to death least the woman's suspicions should be aroused, and that she would refuse to let her follow her. "I am not from the palace. Ask me nothing. I can only tell you that a great misfortune has happened to me, and that I am going to consult the Superior of Saint-Marie, at Chaillot, who is my friend."

The peasant asks no more questions, and La Vallière, who clings to her side, arrives in due time under the walls of Chaillot.

"There, mademoiselle, is the Church of the Sisters of Saint-Marie. Good speed you."

Louise rings the bell, and asks the portress to be permitted to speak with the Superior.

"She is in retreat, madame, and cannot be disturbed," the portress replies.

"In the name of God, my sister, tell her that a person in great affliction craves her help."

The portress does not immediately answer, but leads her into a hall within, at one end of which is the latticed *grille* which divides the professed nuns from the lay sisters.

An hour passes, and no one appears. La Vallière, fatigued by the unaccustomed exercise, almost distracted, gazes wistfully at the bare walls that surround her. This then is to be the living tomb of her youth, her love. This grim refuge or the grave. She turns to the strong door, bound with iron bars, by which she entered, and shudders. She watches the handle; no one comes, not a breath breaks the silence. It seems to her that God and man have alike forsaken her—a creature so vile, so unworthy. Her repentance has come too late. Heaven's mercy-gates are closed! A wild, unreasoning terror seizes her—her brain beats as with iron hammers—she grows cold and faint—a

mist gathers before her eyes—a deadly sickness creeps over her—she falls senseless on the stone floor.

When she opens her eyes, she is lying upon a clean bed, shaded by snowy curtains, in a little white-washed cell; two darked-robed Carmelite sisters are bending over her.

It was not long before the King heard that La Vallière had fled. Not daring to make too public inquiries, he sent for the superintendent of police, La Regnie.

"Find Mademoiselle de la Vallière," he says, "dead or alive; find her instantly—instantly, I say, or I dismiss you from my service."

This was not difficult; the trembling steps of the fugitive were soon traced. La Regnie returns, and informs his royal master that La Vallière is within the Convent of Chaillot. Louis does not lose a moment in following her. He appears at the convent gate, accompanied by his confidant, Lauzun, and demands admittance. Some of the older nuns, scandalized at the idea of a man entering the cloister, refuse to unlock the gate; but the Mother-Superior, wiser in her generation, herself descends, and key in hand undoes the fastenings, and salutes his Majesty with the utmost deference.

Meanwhile, La Vallière, somewhat recovered from her swoon, sits alone beside a narrow window which overlooks the convent garden. She feels dull and oppressed; her eyes are dazed; her head is heavy.

The perfect silence around her, the homely little cell looking into a peaceful garden, full of herbs and vegetables for the service of the convent, in one corner a grove of cypress-trees, which overtops the high walls that encircle it, is all so new and strange to her, that she seems to have passed into another world. She remembers but indistinctly all that has happened, she has almost forgotten how she came there. A pensive melancholy paralyzes her senses. She is very weak and helpless; her brain is still confused. It is all very strange. She cannot collect her thoughts; but over all the mists of memory, plain and distinct, rise a face and form dear to her beyond life.

Suddenly a sound of approaching footsteps awakens the echoes of the long corridor leading to her cell. As well as steps there is a confused hum of many persons talking. At first she listens vaguely; then, as the sounds approach nearer, she springs to her feet. A sound has struck upon her ear—a sound sweeter than music. It is the

King's voice! The door is flung open, and Louis—his handsome face flushed with excitement, his eyes beaming with tenderness—stands before her.

"Come," he says softly, whispering into her ear, and pressing her cold hand within both his own, "come, my beloved, you have nothing in common with this dreary place. I am here to carry you away. Fear no one; I will protect you—I will glory in protecting you. Rise, my Louise, and follow me."

The Carmelite sisters stand peeping in at the door. The Superior alone has followed his Majesty into the cell. Some moments pass before Louise commands her voice to speak; at last, in a scarcely audible whisper, and trembling all over, she says—

"Sire——," then, not daring to meet the King's impassioned glance, she pauses; "Sire," she repeats, "I did not come here of my own accord. I was obliged to leave. My remaining at Saint-Germain offended her Majesty and other great personages"—she stops again, overcome by the recollection of the scene with the Queen and the Duchesse d'Orléans—"personages, Sire, whom I dare not—I *could* not offend." Her soft face is suffused with a blush of anguish; she hangs down

her head. "I was sent away, Sire; it was not my wish to go—indeed it was not my wish!" she adds, in a voice so low and tremulous that Louis could not have heard what she said had he not bent down his ear close to her white lips.

"Then you shall return, dearest, for mine. I am master, and my will is law. I care nothing for 'august personages;' they shall learn to obey me—the sooner the better."

"But, Sire, I cannot be the cause of strife. The Queen-mother and Madame have dismissed me; and they were right," she added in a very faint voice. "I dare not offend them by my presence, after——" she stops, and can say no more.

"Think of the future, Louise, not of the past; it is gone," and Louis takes her trembling hands in his. "A future lies before you full of joy. Leave the Queen-mother to me, Louise. Come—come with me," and with gentle violence he tries to raise her from her chair. "Follow me, and fear nothing."

"Oh, Sire," whispers Louise, the colour again leaving her cheeks, "do not tempt me from my vocation."

"Do not talk to me of your vocation," returns Louis roughly; "what is your vocation to me?

Can you part from me so lightly?" he adds, more gently.

"Alas, Sire, I dare not return to Court; every look would condemn me!"

"Condemn you! Believe me, I will place you so high that no one shall dare to condemn you. Am I not the master?"

"Oh, suffer me to lay my sins upon the altar! Do not seek to prevent it," sighs La Vallière, clasping her hands. "But, remember, Sire, oh, remember, that in my heart you can have no rival but heaven." She speaks with passion, but she dares not look up at him; had she done so, she would have quailed before the expression of his eyes;—they devour her.

All this is said very low, in order not to be overheard by the Superior, who, although she has retired as far as the doorway, is still present.

"Louise, you do not love me. You have never loved me," whispers Louis, and he turns away. He is deeply offended; her resistance to his commands enrages him.

"Ah, heaven!" La Vallière sighs, and turns her blue eyes, swimming with tears, towards him, "would to God it were so!" She speaks in so subdued a tone—she is so crushed, so fragile—

that the King's compassion is suddenly excited; he looks steadfastly into her face; he trembles lest she may die under this trial. Again he takes her hand, raises her from her chair, and draws her towards the door.

"If you love me, Louise, follow me. I cannot live without you!" he adds almost fiercely. "Fear nothing. Her Majesty shall receive you. The Queen-mother and Madame"—at their names La Vallière quivers all over—"shall offend you no longer. Leave this horrible cell, my Louise. Come, and let me enshrine you in a temple worthy of your beauty, your goodness, and of my love," he adds, in a fervid whisper, which makes her heart beat with rapture. "Come!"

Louise returns to Saint-Germain. She is created Duchesse de la Vallière, and is appointed Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Maria Theresa.

CHAPTER LV.

FOUQUET, SUPERINTENDENT OF FINANCE.

NICHOLAS FOUQUET, Marquis de Belle-Isle and Vicomte de Mélun et Vaux,[1] held the post of Superintendent of Finance under the Regency of Anne of Austria. He was continued in this important office after the accession of Louis XIV. Fouquet was insinuating, specious, hypocritical, and sensual; a munificent patron to those about him, and an adorer of the beautiful in art and nature. He was, moreover, one of those courtly financiers so constantly met with before the Revolution, who, however the country starved, always found funds "for the service of his Majesty."

In course of time, Louis grew alarmed at Fouquet's reckless expenditure; his personal magnificence was boundless, but there was not a *sous* of state money in reserve. Colbert was consulted

[1] Vaux-Praslin, near Mélun, is still a superb château. It was sold by the son of the Superintendent to the Maréchal de Villars, who, in his turn, sold it to the Duc de Praslin.

by the King. Colbert was jealous of Fouquet's position; he examined his accounts, and found them incorrect. The King courteously pointed out the errors to Fouquet, who persisted in the perfect accuracy of his figures. Louis, convinced of the Superintendent's dishonesty, resolved to dismiss him on the first opportunity.

But this falsification of accounts was his least cause of offence to his Sovereign. Fouquet had presumed to imitate the Olympian tastes of the *Grand Monarque*. If Louis was a god, his Superintendent was at least a demi-god, and claimed a demi-god's privilege of "loving the daughters of men." Unfortunately, too, he dared to raise his eyes to those particular idols worshipped by the King. His disgrace was therefore certain. Some indistinct rumours of the danger that threatened him reached his ears; he was moved, but not alarmed. He racked his fertile brain how best to recover favour, and he determined to give so magnificent a fête in honour of the King at his country-seat, Vaux, near Mélun, as should remove all suspicion of his loyalty. Such were the customs of the age. Having for years systematically robbed the State, Fouquet was to reinstate himself in favour by a still more public theft!

Before Versailles arose on the sand-hills lying between Saint-Cyr and the wooded uplands of Saint-Cloud, Vaux was the most splendid palace in France. The architect was Le Vau, celebrated by Boileau. The *corps de logis* was surmounted by a dome supported by sixteen marble arches, resting on pillars; two immense pavilions formed the wings. The gardens, designed by Le Nôtre, were decorated with statues, and balustraded terraces bordering canals, and water-works, in the Italian fashion—"surprises," as they were called. All was formal and symmetrical; the very plants and shrubs were only permitted to grow to order. Nature was banished to the distant woods, which spread in verdant folds about the rising ground behind the château, and decked the greensward of the park, ere it reached the waters of the Seine flowing below.

The fête was fixed for the 17th of August. It was a splendid day; the sky was unclouded, and the golden sunshine lighted up the deepest recesses of the forest, when Louis started in the morning from Fontainebleau, where the Court was then staying. He was escorted by d'Artagnan and a regiment of musketeers.

There was a goodly company; the King drove

La Vallière and the Contesse de Guiche in his *calèche;* the Queen-mother came in her coach; other ladies were in litters, but the Queen, who was in an interesting state of health, stayed at home. Fouquet stood ready, at the grand entrance of his palace. He received the King kneeling, and presented to him the keys of Vaux. Louis touched them with his fingers, raised Fouquet from the ground, and in a few gracious words assured him of his favour and protection; with what truth we shall see. The same ceremony was repeated by Madame Fouquet to the Queen-mother, with a like result.

On entering the vestibule, even the Gallic Jupiter was amazed at the magnificence of all he saw. The suite of rooms were arranged in allegorical order, each named after a god or goddess; the ceilings and walls painted to represent their attributes and the events of their lives. The sun and moon, the planets and fixed stars, also formed an important feature in the decorations. The seasons added their attributes, and together with the winds lent themselves gracefully to the necessities of the general arrangements. His Majesty was invited to repose in the billiard-room, dedicated to Hercules, who by a happy invention prefigured himself. From the billiard-room he entered the grand saloon, where

the sun, in gorgeous colours of saffron, crimson, and scarlet, covered the entire ceiling. Louis smiled a smile of gratification; the sun was his acknowledged emblem. Was it possible, he thought, that Fouquet might be forgiven? The Superintendent advanced. He bowed to the ground, and asked leave to explain the legend.

"The sun—the centre of the universe, the creator of light, heat, and life—is your Majesty. Deprived of your gracious presence, we sink into darkness and death. That star beside the sun is myself, Sire, receiving light from your Majesty's benignant rays."

Louis frowned, and bit his lip. It seemed to him that the star was too near the sun; it displeased him. He changed his mind, and now decided that that too assertative star must be extinguished.

From the saloon, Louis passed into a retiring-room, dedicated to the Muses and the Virtues, all with open mouths, grouped round a figure of Fidelity, whose praises they sang.

"Who is represented by Fidelity?" asked Louis, turning to the Duc de Saint-Aignan, in attendance on him.

"I have just been told that Fidelity represents Fouquet himself, your Majesty."

"What on earth can Fidelity have to do with a Superintendent of Finance?" muttered Louis, shrugging his shoulders. "And that female figure conducting Fidelity—who is that?"

"Prudence, I am told," replied Saint-Aignan. "Prudence; and the one on the other side is Reason."

"Prudence, Reason, and Fidelity guiding Fouquet. *Ma foi*, it is not bad," and an ironical smile passed over the monarch's face. "But we have not done with the paintings yet. Who are the others?"

"That figure, Sire, in a golden-coloured robe, is Clio, I am told, the Muse of History. With one hand she assists Fidelity into heaven, with the other she records the annals of his life."

"The annals of *his* life," muttered the King (for Fouquet stood near at hand, to be summoned by his Sovereign when wanted). "It will be well for him if history does not record his signal disgrace. He may prove another Phaeton, this M. Fouquet, and fall from the stars into eternal darkness. Jupiter still grasps his thunders. Let us leave this room—it stifles me," said Louis aloud. "What is the meaning of the device of the serpents I see everywhere?" again inquired Louis of the Duke.

"The serpents represent Colbert, the rival of Fouquet, Sire. Fidelity, Reason, and Discretion crush these serpents as you see."

"Really, these allegories are charming, M. Fouquet," said Louis, with a covert sneer, turning towards his host, and speaking in a loud voice, "but allegories are not always truthful." Fouquet bowed to the ground, and turned very pale.

After having examined the interior of the château, and partaken of a sumptuous refection, the King was invited to pass into the garden to see the illuminations.

There the whole horizon was aglow. On three broad terraces, of the purest white marble, which extended along the entire façade of the building, rows of golden candelabra bore myriads of wax lights, and borders of gigantic orange-trees, in full blossom, shone with orbs of variegated light, that glittered on the dark surface of the polished leaves. Below, in a vast square, fashioned into a sunken parterre of flowers, arranged in various patterns, cunningly concealed lamps of every hue were hidden among the leaves, their innumerable flamelets forming a carpet of living fire. Jets of flame leaped from tree to tree. Beyond the parterre, the broad canal banks blazed and palpitated

with fiery heat. The waters, of a ruddy hue, now reflecting the gorgeous scene, now riven into *jets d'eau* and fountains which blaze upwards for an instant, throwing up clouds of rockets that sport like comets among the stars, to fall back in cascades of golden sparks. Beyond, in the woods, each noble forest-tree, in minutest detail of every branch and twig, stood out in relief against what appeared a vault of fire. Long vistas led far away among stalwart oaks and feathery limes, growing out of a sea of flames. All around there was nothing but fire—dazzling, overwhelming fire. Now it turned to green, then by some magic touch it changed to blue, then flashed into crimson; while *feux de joie* and cannon roared from concealed batteries, and shook the very air. Behind, the architectural lines of the château were marked by clusters of golden lamps. Every room shone brighter than at noon, and the central dome, with its graceful colonnade, blazed like a volcano. On the terrace, in front of the château, military bands clashed with joyous symphonies. When these ceased, soft music sounded from out the fiery woods, from violins and flutes, swelling in the cadences of some tender melody. The crowd below, changing with the metamorphose of the lights, formed a fitting fore-

ground to this burning perspective. It was a scene of artificial life after Lancret, backed by a conflagration. Brocaded trains swept along the fine gravel of the walks. Wreaths of diamonds sparkled on voluminous wigs, which fell in heavy curls over neck and shoulders. Long white feathers, and finest Brussels lace, fringed and decked turned-up hats of velvet. Glittering officers were side by side with comely pages, brighter than butterflies. Gold embroideries shone on delicately coloured velvets, satins, and watered-silks; priceless jewels glittered on knee and shoe, on neck and arm, on waist and drapery; torsades on hats, and sword-hilts flashed and multiplied the fiery marvels of the night. Even *le Grand Monarque*, as he paused upon the terrace to observe the scene, deigned to express his admiration and surprise. But his praise was scant, his words cold, he spoke morosely, and his brows were knit.

The more he investigated the magnificence of Vaux, the more he believed the accusations of Colbert. Fouquet heard the praise; he did not observe the frown. He was radiant. Louis looked round, anxious to escape from the glare and the company, and to retire into some shady grove with La Vallière. She was very beautiful that evening,

and Louis reproached himself for ever having caused her pain. She wore a dress of white stuff, worked with golden leaves; a blue ribbon, tied in a knot in front, encircled her small waist. Her light hair, untouched by powder, and sown with flowers and pearls, fell over her shoulders, and two enormous emeralds hung in her ears. Her arms were uncovered, but to conceal their thinness, she wore above the elbow a broad circlet of gold set with opals. Her gloves were of fine Brussels lace, showing the rosy skin beneath. Her graceful yet dignified manners, her tender blue eyes, breathing nothing but love and gentleness, her look of patient goodness, were never more charming than when seen among the painted and powdered belles of that intriguing Court. It was impossible for Louis to have a word with her in private. Every feminine eye was bent upon him. All the ladies—young, old, fair and dark—pressed round him as he moved among the alleys and terraces of the illuminated garden. He was the rose that attracted alike the butterflies and the grubs—the sunshine and the shadow. Like royalty of all ages, Louis soon grew weary of this espionage, and called for the Duc de Saint-Aignan. He was nowhere to be found. At last, after having walked up and down the three

terraces, admired the great cascade and the grotto, afterwards to be repeated at Saint-Cloud, he sought out the Queen-mother, and found her seated on the terrace, surveying the illumination at a distance. Louis leaned over the marble balustrade near her.

"This is magnificent, my mother," said he; "so magnificent that I believe every word Colbert has told me. Colbert showed me peculations on paper; I see them here with my own eyes. Think of the millions he must have spent! Look at my palace of Saint-Germain—dilapidated, dismal; Fontainebleau still unfinished. It is shameful! Fouquet is a mushroom, who has nourished himself out of my revenues. I can crush him—I *will* crush him—destroy him!" and the King stamped his foot savagely on a pavement of coloured marbles.

"My son, do not speak so loudly," replied the Queen.

At this moment Saint-Aignan appeared ascending the steps from below.

"Where have you been, Duke?" asked Louis sharply.

"A thousand pardons, your Majesty. They searched for me in the wrong place. You will not, however, have reason to regret my absence,"

and he gave the King a look full of meaning, and signed to him to move farther off from all possibility of listeners. "Sire," continued he, "I have made a discovery."

"A discovery! Where? What have you found?" and Louis drew closer to him.

"Sire, I fear you have a rival," and Saint-Aignan glanced significantly at the Duchesse de la Vallière, who sat on a settee behind, not far from the Queen-mother.

"A rival! Ridiculous! You have been asleep and dreaming, Duke."

"No, Sire; on the faith of a peer of France, no. Your Majesty has a rival, I repeat."

"What do I care for rivals! I have her heart," and Louis glanced tenderly at La Vallière.

"But is your Majesty so certain?"

"Certain? Ask me if I live!" exclaimed Louis with warmth. "But tell me what you mean. Speak, Duke, and speak quickly, for we may be interrupted."

"Well, Sire, some fairy, who I suppose watches over your interests, told me to wander over the château and examine the more private chambers. No one was by. Every one was in the garden with your Majesty to see the illuminations. At the end

of a long gallery, in a distant part of the house, I came upon a boudoir—such a bijou of a room!—evidently belonging to Fouquet. On the walls hung the portraits of some of the fairest ladies of the Court. It is a hall of beauty, Sire."

"Go on," said Louis impatiently; "I understand."

"Among these beauties, Sire, was—well—there was the lady you honour with your special attentions—Madame la Duchesse"—and Saint-Aignan stopped, and again indicated La Vallière, who, unconscious of what was going on, sat near, her delicate cheek resting on her hand.

"You need mention no names, Saint-Aignan. I tell you, I understand," replied the King with evident irritation. "And pray what does it matter if you did find the portrait of that lady there? I see nothing in it at all remarkable. No hall of beauty would be complete without her likeness. Who were the other portraits?"

"Ah, Sire, that is precisely the point I am coming to. They were all portraits of ladies who are or have been the acknowledged mistresses of Fouquet. If Madame la Duchesse de——"

"I beg you again not to mention any names,

Duke," broke in the King haughtily, a storm gathering on his brow.

"If that lady, Sire, had not resembled the others, why should she have been there?"

To this somewhat daring question Louis did not vouchsafe a reply. His countenance darkened into an expression of silent rage. His eyes glittered as he passed his hand over them. When he spoke there was doubt, anxiety, as well as anger in his voice and manner. "I am astonished, I confess," said he, speaking very deliberately. "I am quite at a loss to explain it. Her portrait is there, you say. It may be, Saint-Aignan. I cannot doubt your word, but—it is impossible that——" He paused, and his eyes rested on her guileless face.

"Sire, it is not for me to differ from your Majesty," rejoined Saint-Aignan, fearful lest he had injured self in the King's opinion by his over-frankness; "your superior intellect and far-seeing judgment will unfold to you mysteries impervious to my grosser comprehension; but I repeat, in the boudoir of M. Fouquet I saw the portrait of Madame La Duchesse — I beg your Majesty's pardon—placed among those of ladies whose relations with him are more than equivocal."

"I will speak to the lady myself. She is igno-

rant of this, I venture my life," said Louis, his eyes again fixing themselves wistfully upon La Vallière. "In the meantime, Duke, I thank you for your zeal in my service. Now, remember, until our return to Fontainebleau *silence*—absolute silence —or I shall never forgive you." Louis placed his finger on his lip—Saint-Aignan, glad to end so perilous an interview, bowed, and immediately fell back among the crowd of courtiers who hovered about the King.

Louis's blood boiled within him. He had controlled himself in the presence of Saint-Aignan, but it was with the greatest difficulty he could any longer restrain his passion. He longed then and there to call in the musketeers, and arrest Fouquet on the spot. D'Artagnan and his followers were at hand; it would have been the work of an instant. At a loss what to do, and feeling the necessity for some expression of the violent rage he felt, he approached his mother, Anne of Austria, who was leaning back in her chair, absorbed in a deep reverie. She was only present at that dazzling fête in body—her mind was far away. To her the pomps and vanities of the world were become a mockery and a toil; she longed for the seclusion of the cloister.

"It is all over," whispered the King, and his

voice grated huskily in her ear; "Fouquet will be arrested to-night."

"What has he done?" asked Anne of Austria.

"I have excellent reasons, my mother; besides, Fouquet may escape to Belle Isle—here I have him, I hold him!" and Louis, in his heat, shook his fist in his mother's face.

"You are strangely moved, Louis. I do not know your reasons, but I advise you, for the sake of your own dignity, to choose a more suitable moment than during a fête at which you are present in his own house."

"Every time is good to catch a traitor."

"Yes; but, my son, there is such a thing as decorum. The Superintendent has given you a superb fête, which you have accepted. You are under his roof; you cannot arrest him while you are his guest. It is out of the question."

"But, my mother, I have reasons of state."

"Then they must wait. What would the Court —what would France—say to such an act? Take care, my son, that those who may never know your justification do not condemn your act. Even *you* are not above public opinion."

Louis did not reply, but the Queen-mother perceived that her words had convinced him.

The Court returned to Fontainebleau in the same order as it came.

A *lettre de cachet*, dated the day after the fête, consigned Fouquet to the fortress of Pignerol. Louise de la Vallière was enabled to soothe his Majesty's indignation, with regard to the portrait, by assuring him that if his indignation had been aroused, her feelings had been much more grossly outraged.

CHAPTER LVI.

DEATH AND POISON.

"ANNE, daughter of Philip III., King of Spain, and Margaret of Austria, his wife, married to Louis XIII., King of France, surnamed the Just, mother of Louis XIV., surnamed Dieudonné, and of Philip of France, Duc d'Orléans, born September, 1601, died January, 1666."

These words stood at the head of a will which was signed "*approved*, Louis." Anne of Austria has stood before us, from her fifteenth year until now; first, the golden-haired girl, next the persecuted wife, then the stately regent, finally the devoted and conscientious mother. And now her time has come; she is dying at the Louvre. Her malady is a cancer in the breast, long concealed, now aggravated by the ignorance of quacks. Latterly it has become an open wound, the seat of intense suffering. Her daintily nurtured body and sensitive skin, which could not bear the touch of

any but the finest and softest linen, the delicate habits of her daily life, her extreme refinement of mind and person (not common in those days even among princes), have come to this: "God punishes me in that body which I have too carefully tended," she said. But the Queen's mind had long been weaned from the world, her once lofty spirit schooled to the uses of adversity, and she bears her protracted sufferings with admirable meekness and resignation. Her face shrunken, drawn, and ashen, her frame bowed with intense pain rather than the weight of years, have lost all trace of their singular beauty; but the hands and arms are still white, plump and shapely, and to the last, her son Louis XIV. reverently kisses those taper fingers that had fondly entwined themselves among his clustering curls from boy to man. As long as that silvery voice could make itself heard, it was as a peacemaker and as a friend. When Maria Theresa, her niece, complained to her of the King's too apparent *liaison* with La Vallière, the dying Queen stroked her cheek, and comforted her, praying her to pardon the fire of youthful blood, and to remember that Louis, if erring, both loved and respected her; and, she reminded her, "that she (Maria Theresa) had at least a much

happier lot than her own." Overcome by suffering during the long watches of the night, when she could not sleep, she weeps; as the tears roll down her wrinkled cheeks, Mademoiselle de Beauvais wipes them away with her handkerchief.

"I do not really weep, *ma bonne*," said the dying Queen; "these tears that I shed are forced from me by intense anguish; you know I never cry." The Archbishop d'Auch, seeing her condition, told her plainly that the doctor despaired of her life.

"I thank God," she answered. "Do not lament," added she, turning to her ladies, whose sobs caught her ear; "we must all die. I am still among you; when I am gone, then grieve for me, not yet."

Her son, Philippe d'Orléans, sat constantly beside her bed. While he was present she never allowed herself to utter a complaint, but when he left her, she turned to Madame de Motteville and said, "I suffer horribly. There is no single part of my whole body that is not rent with pain." Then raising her eyes to heaven she exclaimed, "Praised be God, it is his will, his will be done—I submit to it with all my heart; yes, with all my heart." Yet in this condition she took the liveliest

interest in all that concerned her sons and the King of Spain, and caused every letter to be read aloud to her coming from Madrid. Two nights before her death she bade good night to her children with a haste unusual with her. It was because she did not wish them to witness sufferings she could no longer conceal. As soon as they were gone she desired that the litany of the Passion should be chanted throughout the weary hours of the night. Now and then her groans interrupted the solemn office. When her women strove to mitigate her agony, she pushed them away, saying,

"My vile body is given up to the justice of God. I care not what becomes of it."

In the morning the King, of whom she was ever devotedly fond, and who warmly returned her love, remained many hours with her. That afternoon she grew worse. During the night her son Monsieur hid himself in the curtains of her bed, not to leave her, as she had earnestly desired he would do. The next morning, it was deemed advisable to administer extreme unction. The King and Queen, Monsieur d'Orléans, Madame his wife, and Mademoiselle de Montpensier were present. They went out to meet the Lord's body and to bear it to her. After she had communicated. a

heavenly expression spread over her countenance, her eyes shone with unnatural brilliancy, and the colour returned to her cheeks.

"Observe my dear mother" whispered the King, who was standing at the foot of her bed, to Mademoiselle de Beauvais, "I never saw her look more beautiful." Then she called her children round her, and solemnly blessed them. These four, her two sons and their wives, knelt by her bedside. They kissed her hands and shed tears of a common grief. The curtains were then closed, that the Queen might take a little rest. When they were undrawn, the film of death had gathered on her eyes.

* * * * * *

Beautiful Saint-Cloud, enfolded in softly undulating hills, its sheeny lawns and majestic avenues descending to the Seine, whose clear waters dance and ripple below in the soft spring light;—Saint-Cloud, with its dimpling uplands and lofty summits, on whose topmost verge stands what was once a Roman watch-tower, looking towards Lutetia, the ancient Paris, now a Grecian temple called the Lanterne de Diogène;—Saint-Cloud, dense, leafy, forest-like; yonder a deep glen, in which the morning shadows lie; above, grassy meads of finest

greensward, where the primrose and the cowslip, the anemone and the foxglove blossom under scattered groups of noble trees, gay with every shade of green; oaks yellow with new leaves; delicate beech and the soft foliage of the tufted elm; all rising out of a sea of paler-tinted copsewood. Midway on the hill-side, the ground suddenly falls; and the woods melt into sculptured terraces, on which the spray of many fountains catch and reflect the morning sun. These terraces are again broken by a magnificent cascade, which dashes downwards, to be presently ingulfed by the overhanging trees, before it falls into the river.

It is early summer. The air is full of perfume. The scent of new-made hay and the odour of dew-laden flowers are wafted from the terraces towards the palace, lying in the lowest lap of the hills, shut in by hanging gardens, its pillared portico basking in the sunshine.

From the days of Gondi, the Italian banker, the friend of Zametti, who was more than suspected of poisoning la belle Gabrielle—for both Gondi and Zametti had country houses there—Saint-Cloud was a fair and pleasant place. Hither came Catherine de Medici to give great fêtes and banquets, and to visit such of her countrymen as lived near the palace,

all of them skilful Italian Jews, dealing largely in money, with which they were ready to supply the royal coffers—on exorbitant interest, be it well understood—who received her with oriental magnificence, and dressed out the heights, the terraces, and the gardens with silken flags and embroidered banners, in the Italian style, to do her honour. Within this palace was struck down Henry III., the last of Catherine's sons, the last prince of the royal house of Valois, by the hand of Jacques Clément, the Dominican. Here Henri Quatre was proclaimed king, and here, in due process of time, came to live the Duc d'Orléans, brother of Louis XIV.—Philippe d'Orléans, once a peevish child, is now a soft, effeminate gentleman. In person he is the *replica* of the King, only in fainter colours; a water-colour sketch of an original design in oils. He lives among his favourites, whom the world stigmatizes as gamblers and scoundrels, especially the Chevalier de Lorraine, who governs Monsieur despotically.

All the world (except her husband) adores the brilliant Henrietta, Duchesse d'Orléans, his wife and cousin-german, who, with her mother, Henrietta Maria, suffered so much at the Louvre from poverty, that they lay in bed for the sake of warmth. Now,

her brother, Charles II., sits on the throne of England, and she loves not to have the days of her adversity recalled. Henrietta d'Orléans is not an absolute beauty. Like her mother, her features are irregular, and her mouth large, but her fresh English colouring tells well among the olive-complexioned ladies of the Court. She is tall, and eminently graceful. Her sunny smile, her ready wit, her joyous manners, win every heart she cares to gain. But, as we have seen, she can be both haughty and cruel. Once she had hoped to marry her elder cousin, the King; but the Mancini girls stepped in, and she was forced to content herself with his younger brother, Philip, whom she despises and dislikes.

Now matters have grown worse than ever between them, for the Duke of Monmouth—illegitimate son of Charles II. by Lucy Waters—has come to Court, and does not conceal his admiration for his English relative, nor observe those precise rules of etiquette needful at the French Court. What makes matters worse is, that Madame, exasperated by her husband, is defiant, and publicly encourages his attentions. Monsieur, weak-headed and irritable, complains to everybody. He says he shall leave the Court, unless Madame conducts herself better. Madame

rejoins that he only persecutes her because she happens to be aunt to the Duke of Monmouth. To spite Monsieur, she uses her influence with the King, and Monsieur's favourite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, —who whispers these tales about her into her husband's ear,—is packed off to the sea-girt fortress of the Château d'If, near Marseilles. This aggravates Monsieur, who treats Madame worse than ever. They have fresh quarrels every day, during one of which Monsieur calls Madame a "*vaurienne.*" Even when they ride together in the King's coach, Monsieur must insult and taunt his wife. "He believes in astrology," he says, "and as his horoscope foretells he shall be the husband of many wives, and Madame looks ill, he hopes he shall soon have a change." At this rude speech Madame weeps, but says nothing. All this is very bad, and creates such a scandal that Louis interferes; he expostulates with his brother.

The King, to give Madame a little respite, appointed her at this time his ambassadress into England, to treat with her brother, Charles II. In her suite she carried the beautiful Bretonne, Louise de la Querouaille, who became afterwards so well known in this country as the Duchess of Portsmouth.

After a time Madame returns from England, blooming in health and joyous in spirits. She cannot bring herself even to affect common concern for the death of her mother,—poor broken-down Henrietta Maria,—who has just died from taking an overdose of opium. Monsieur refuses to meet his wife at Amiens, a public slight which nettled her exceedingly, especially as the Chevalier de Lorraine has returned from banishment, and is again at Saint-Cloud.

Madame is now twenty-six, and as strong and healthy as any young woman can be. Very early on a certain morning, in the first days of June, a page rides out of the park gates of Saint-Cloud in furious haste. He bears a message of life and death to the King, who is at Saint-Germain. He spurs his steed along the paved roads which lead from palace to palace, along the heights. The word he carries is—*that Madame is dying.* Never did messenger of evil cause such consternation. The King flies to Saint-Cloud; he loved the sweet princess. He is followed by the Queen, accompanied by *la Grande Mademoiselle.* When the royal coach draws up under the grand portico, Valtot, the Court doctor, is there to receive them. He says the illness of Madame is nothing but a

violent attack of colic, and is of no consequence whatever. But this attack of colic had seized Madame so suddenly she could not bear to be carried to her own bed, but lay on a little couch in a recess of one of the reception-rooms. A very serious attack of colic, truly. When Maria Theresa enters, she finds Madame in convulsions; her long hair streaming over her face and pillow, her limbs cramped, her body contorted, her nightgown unfastened to relieve her breathing, her arms bare and hanging out of the sleeves, her face bearing every appearance of approaching death.

"You see what a state I am in," she whispers to the Queen between the paroxysms. "Save me, oh save me—my sufferings are horrible!"

The Queen kisses her hand. Every one was affected. The King leans over her with the utmost affection.

"Surely," cries the King to Valtot, "you will not let her die without help?"

Except the royal party no one seems to care about her. Monsieur is quite indifferent. He laughs and talks in the very room where she is lying.

The end came soon. In a few hours, Madame died in horrible agony. Her corpse immediately turned black.

* * * * * *

Louis XIV. is in his private closet at Saint-Germain. He is in his robe de chambre, and he has been weeping; three extraordinary events for the King, not to hold his usual lever, to wear his robe de chambre, and to weep.

A dreadful rumour has just reached him—the words *poison* and *murder* have passed from mouth to mouth about the Court. At last he has heard them. What!—his beloved sister-in-law, she who but two days before had danced with him in a ballet, dressed as Aurora; she—the pride of his Court, the cynosure of all eyes—poisoned! Oh, horrible! By whom was this poison given? By his brother? Impossible. By one of his disgraceful favourites whom Madame hated? The Chevalier de Lorraine, perhaps? Was he the murderer? The King cannot brook suspense or delay. He sends privately for Morel, the *maître d'hôtel* of his brother. Morel comes trembling; he guesses the reason of the summons.

"Morel," says the King in an unsteady voice, "I have sent for you to tell me the truth. Now, on pain of instant death, answer me. Who murdered my sister-in-law? Presume not to equivocate or to deceive me. Did the Duchess die by poison?"

"She did, your Majesty."

Louis shudders. "By whose order was it administered?"

"By the order of the Chevalier de Lorraine," answers Morel. "Poison was put into a cup of chicorée-water, the Duchess's usual beverage, by the hands of the Marquis d'Effiat. Before God, your Majesty, I am innocent of all save the knowledge of this crime."

Louis, seeing that Morel is about to cast himself on his knees before him, by a stern gesture forbade it. He then motions him to proceed.

"The Duchess, Sire, complained of thirst; soon after a cup of chicorée-water—the cup of porcelain, which her Highness always used—was presented; she drank its contents to the last drop. Soon after she was seized with convulsions. Your Majesty knows the rest."

There is a pause. "Tell me," asks Louis, speaking with a great effort, "tell me, had my brother—had the Duc d'Orléans any part in this crime?"

"I believe not, Sire," answers Morel, shaking from head to foot, for the King's looks are not reassuring. "They dared not trust him; he would have betrayed them. But it was believed that the death of Madame would not be——"

"Answer as I desire you, sir. Answer the questions I address to you, nothing more," interrupts the King, scowling at him, at the same time greatly relieved by hearing that his brother was not an accomplice. "I have heard what I want to know. I am satisfied. I will spare your life, wretched man," and he turns from Morel with disgust, "because you have spoken the truth; but you must leave France for ever. Remember, the honour of princes is in your hand, and that wherever you fly, their vengeance can pursue you. Therefore, be silent, if you value your life."

The King dared investigate no farther; too foul a picture of his brother's life would have been revealed to public curiosity. The death of this charming, though frivolous princess, remained unavenged, her murderers unpunished, and she was soon forgotten in the dissipation of a Court where the Sovereign set an example of the most heartless egotism.

As for Monsieur, nothing daunted by the suspicions attached to his name, and although believed by many to have been a direct accomplice in Henrietta's death, he determined to bring home a fresh wife to Saint-Cloud and the Palais Royal. This he did in the person of a German princess (ever

the refuge of unfortunate royalty in search of wives), a formidable she-dragon rather, by name Charlotte de Bavière, a lady certainly well able to defend herself in case of need. What a contrast to the feminine, fascinating Henrietta! Charlotte's autobiography remains to us, a lasting evidence of her coarseness of mind and of body. This is the opening page:—

"I am naturally rather melancholy. When anything annoys me, I have always an inflammation in my left side, as if I had a dropsy. Lying in bed is not at all my habit. As soon as I wake I must get up. I seldom take breakfast. If I do, I only eat bread and butter. I neither like chocolate, coffee, nor tea. Foreign drugs are my horror. I am entirely German in my habits, and relish nothing in the way of food but the *cuisine* of my own country. I can only eat soup made with milk, beer, or wine. As to *bouillon*, I detest it. If I eat any dish that contains it, I am ill directly, my body swells, and I am fearfully sick. Nothing but sausages and ham restore the tone of my stomach. I always wanted to be a boy," this extraordinary "Princess" continues, "and having heard that Marie Germain became one by continually jumping, I used to take such fearful leaps, that it

is a miracle I did not break my neck a thousand times."

This was the mother of the Regent Orléans.

Charlotte de Bavière was walking one evening alone in the dusk through the almost interminable suite of rooms which encircled the four garden fronts of the Palais Royal. Many of these rooms had been constantly inhabited by her predecessor, Madame Henrietta. It was stormy weather, and the gathering clouds were rapidly darkening what little daylight was left. The wind moaned among the branches of the trees without; it whistled through the rooms within, swaying the rich curtains to and fro. The shutters were not yet closed. The Duchess wandered on from room to room until she reached a remote apartment on the ground-floor, which had been much frequented by Madame Henrietta—a garden pavilion opening by large windows and a flight of steps to a parterre. At this window Charlotte stood watching the clouds passing over the moon which had just risen, as they were drifted rapidly onwards, driven by the wind. How long she remained there she could not tell. All at once a slight sound behind her, like the rustling of drapery along the floor, caught her ear. She turned, and saw

advancing from the door towards the spot where she stood a white figure, wearing the form of the late Duchess, her predecessor, Henrietta of England. She knew her instantly from her portraits. What passed between these two—the dead and the living wife—never was told. Charlotte, all her life long, insisted on the perfect truth of this story, but would say nothing more. In time it came to be understood that some awful secret connected with the Orleans family, only to be known to the head of the house, was revealed by the phantom.

CHAPTER LVII.

AT VERSAILLES.

THE Duchesse Louise de la Vallière, after her return from Chaillot, lived much at the Hôtel Biron, a residence at Versailles presented to her by the King. Her two children, the Comte de Vermandois and Mademoiselle de Blois, were with her. The Hôtel Biron, a sumptuous abode, situated between "court and garden," lay in a hollow close to the yet unfinished Palace of Versailles, on the same side as the reservoir. Adjoining were the royal gardens, already planned and partially completed by Le Nôtre. These gardens, with the formal groves and symmetrical thickets which enclose them, sloped downwards from the grand terrace of the southern front, and overshadowed the hôtel, giving it a sequestered, not to say, melancholy aspect. On the other side a wooded park stretched away in the direction of what was in time to become the site of the two Trianons. The new

Palace of Versailles was as yet covered with scaffolding; innumerable workmen laboured night and day on the north and south wings. The *corps de logis*, of brick and stone, was alone completed, and though greatly enlarged and beautified, still retained those suites of small rooms—*les petits appartements*—portions of the original hunting-lodge which was so often visited by Louis XIII. in his hunting expeditions.

La Vallière lived a life of extreme retirement. She rarely appeared at Court, except upon occasions of state, and received only such visits as etiquette rendered necessary. Save the King, her confessor, and a few intimate friends, she avoided every one. The splendour of the retreat assigned her by the King pained and humiliated her. She was but too conscious that in permitting herself to be dowered and ennobled by him, she was exposing herself to the charge of ambition, arrogance, and avarice—she, who only loved the man, and who shrank abashed from the sovereign!

The very letters patent by which Louis created her Duchesse de la Vallière infinitely wounded her. It was intolerable to her to be publicly addressed as "his singularly and entirely beloved Louise Françoise de la Vallière, possessed of His Majesty's

special and particular affection." Vainly had she endeavoured to combat his resolution thus to distinguish her; vainly had she entreated him to allow her to sink into oblivion, forgotten by all save himself. Louis had declared, and with truth, that after her flight to Chaillot and her return to Saint-Germain, all mystery was impossible. He could not bear, he told her, to see her continually suffering affronts and mortifications in his own Court, to which her sensitive nature specially exposed her, and from which even he could not screen her.

Vainly did he invoke all his authority as a sovereign, all his devotion as a man, to raise the object of his love beyond the reach of calumny. Vainly did he surround her with all that the luxury of kings, the treasures of the state, and the refinements of love could devise to reconcile her to her position. He could not stifle her conscience. Louise could not bring herself to leave him, but she sank under the consciousness of her sin.

When, by a formal declaration of the parliament, her children were legitimatized and created princes of the blood royal, she was in absolute despair. Again she conjured the King never more to let her name be heard. But, selfish even to her, Louis commanded that she should appear in the

Queen's circle, and receive the congratulations of the Court. A prey to anxiety and remorse, silent, yearning, solitary, her health gave way. Her lovely figure lost its roundness, her violet eyes their lustre. She grew dull, oppressed, and tearful, and her lameness increased.

The Comtesse du Roule, formerly maid of honour to Madame Henrietta d'Orléans at the same time as La Vallière, was one of the few friends she still received.

They had not met for some time when Madame du Roule called on her. Madame du Roule found Louise seated alone in a pavilion overlooking the palace of Versailles. She was so lost in thought she did not hear her friend's footsteps. When she rose to receive her she looked more delicate and dejected than usual.

"Dear Louise," said the Comtesse after having saluted her, "how I grieve to see you so unhappy. Can nothing be done to console you? Remember you are ruining your looks. Do you imagine that his Majesty will care for you when you have made yourself wrinkled and ugly?"

"Alas, Celestine, I cannot help it! I ought not to be here," and Louise kissed her tenderly, and placed her on a seat beside her. "This magnifi-

cent hôtel, these royal servants, my luxurious life—daily remind me of my degradation. While I was unknown and poor, lost among the crowd of a great Court, I was mistress of my own feelings. My heart was my own to bestow. Now"—and she placed her hand on her heart as if she suffered—"a price seems put upon me. I cannot bear it! Ah, why did I leave Chaillot?" and her head, covered with light baby curls, sank upon her bosom; and she heaved a deep sigh.

"But, Louise, if you love the King," said the Comtesse, laying her hand gently on that of La Vallière, "you must accept the inevitable position, else some one less scrupulous and more mercenary than yourself will certainly take it."

"Ah, Celestine, that fear is ever present to me. It is agony to me; it keeps me here. Do not imagine that I misunderstand my position. I suffer because it is too painfully evident. Yet I love the King too much to resign him. Love! ah, more—I worship him!" and she raised her head, and an inner light shone from her soft, grey eyes, that made them glow with passion. "Is he not my master—my sovereign!" she continued; "am I not bound to obey him? Could I exist without him? Who else but Louis could have brought me back

from Chaillot? Who else could have torn me from the altar to which my heart still clings? Celestine, I know I shall return to that convent."—The Comtesse smiled incredulously.—"But," continued La Vallière, "when I see my faded face in the glass, and I know I am faded and changed"—Madame du Roule shook her head deprecatingly—"I tremble—oh, I tremble lest I should lose him! I know I ought to rejoice at his loss," added she in a broken voice; "yet I cannot—I cannot!" and the tears streamed from her eyes, and she covered her face with her hands.

"Have you perceived any difference in the behaviour of his Majesty of late?" asked Madame du Roule, when La Vallière became more composed.

"Oh, what a question, Celestine! Such an idea never crossed my mind—changed now, at this time—could it be possible? When I spoke of losing him, I meant in the course of years—long, long years. Surely he would not change now?" An agonized expression came into her face as she spoke, and she turned appealingly towards her friend for reassurance against what presented itself to her as some horrible dream.

"I only ask you this question for your good,

dear Louise," answered the Comtesse soothingly, imprinting a kiss on her pallid cheek.—La Vallière threw her arms round her neck, and made no reply.—"I see you are incapable of judging for yourself. If I ask a painful question, it is to spare you, not to wound you. Answer me honestly, Louise—is his Majesty changed?"

A shudder passed over the slender frame of La Vallière. For a time she could not bring herself to reply; then hesitatingly she answered: "I have fancied—but, oh heavens! may it be only a fancy—that his Majesty finds his visits to me more dull than formerly. I am so depressed myself, that must be the reason," and she bent her eyes upon her friend, hoping that she would assent; but Madame du Roule only listened with grave attention. "He has sat," continued Louise, evidently forcing herself to a painful confession, "he has sat for half an hour at a time quite silent, a thing unusual with him. He has remarked, too, repeatedly, on my altered looks; he has often regretted my low spirits. He is most considerate, most tender; but"—and she faltered more than ever—"I fear that I depress him; and I have tried—" here her voice dropped, and her eyes fixed themselves upon a medallion portrait of Louis that hung

round her neck by a chain of gold. She contemplated it earnestly.

"That is just what I feared, Louise," and the Comtesse laid her hand softly on her shoulder to rouse her from the deep reverie into which she had fallen; "that is precisely what I feared. If you cease to amuse the King, others will; he will leave you."

"Holy Virgin!" cried Louise, starting from her chair and clasping her hands; "do not say so; such an idea is death to me!"

"Louise, be calm; reseat yourself, and listen to me. You rarely go to Court; but you well know that his Majesty is surrounded from morning till night with crowds of most fascinating, most unscrupulous women. They follow him like his shadow; he cannot shake them off—even if he would. The poor Queen, who is as stupid as an owl, sits in a corner, sighs and sulks, or plays at cards, and loses thousands to pass away the time. But she says nothing, and has no influence whatever over her husband. By-the-way, she is very jealous of you, Louise, and calls you 'the lady with the diamond ear-rings.'"

La Vallière blushed, then sighed; and again her dreamy eyes sought the medallion portrait of the

King, which she still held within the palm of her hand.

"Rouse yourself, Louise; believe me there is need," urged the Comtesse. "When the King visits you next, throw off these gloomy vapours; or, if you cannot, invite some friend to be present and assist you in entertaining him."

The tears gathered in La Vallière's eyes, and slowly coursed each other down her cheeks.

"Alas! has it come to this, then? Do you indeed, Celestine, counsel me to call on another to do that which was once my privilege? How he once loved my company! how he praised my gentleness and my timidity, which charmed him inexpressibly, he said, after the boldness of the ladies of the Court."

"All this is folly," said Madame de Roule impatiently. "The King is robust, happy, and fond of pleasure. He delights in the society of women. You must, Louise, either return to Chaillot, as you say you desire to do (excuse my frankness, dear, it is for your good), or you must change. His Majesty is neither a penitent, nor ill, nor sad. Do you know any one you can invite here when he comes?"

"No," replied La Vallière with a look of infinite

distress upon her plaintive face. "No one I could trust. Besides, the King might resent it as a liberty. It is a matter needing the nicest judgment."

"The person, whoever she is," said Madame du Roule, "must be sincerely attached to you, polished, agreeable, and sympathetic. She must be good-looking, and not too old either; for the King loves youth and beauty. There is the new lady-in-waiting, the Marquise de Montespan. You have seen her. She is a mere girl, just come to Court, and belongs to no clique. She is as witty as a Mortémart ought to be, and gloriously handsome. Such eyes, dear Louise, such colour! and there is plenty of fun, not to say malice, about her. I would not have her for an enemy! When she was presented to the Queen, there was the most extraordinary sensation at Court—people stood on chairs to look at her."

"But, dear Celestine, what a hag I shall look beside this fresh young beauty?" cried La Vallière in alarm.

"You need have no fear of that. The King is perhaps the only man in the whole circle who does not admire her. You would be quite safe to invite her. She is full of badinage, positively a child in

her love of amusement; her lively sallies will help to pass the time. She desires, too, greatly to be presented to you, and has already conceived a romantic friendship for you."

"Ah, Celestine, are you sure that this girl, this Mortémart—they are a dangerous family—seeks me for myself alone? Are you sure that she has no deeper motive for all these professions? I confess I have my misgivings."

"You are quite mistaken, Louise. She is a naïve creature, clever indeed, but guileless. You could not make a better choice. Take my advice, ask his Majesty's permission to invite the Marquise next time he comes. Believe me, he is perfectly indifferent to her. He will be grateful to you for the attention; he will be amused. You will find him return to his first ardour, he will be as devoted as at first. You will recover your spirits; you will return to Court" (La Vallière shook her head sadly), "and all will be well!"

CHAPTER LVIII.

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

ATHANASE DE MORTÉMART, Marquise de Montespan, the most beautiful woman of her age, was, at this time, twenty-two years old. She was fair, but not so fair as La Vallière. Her features were faultless, and there was an aureole of youth and freshness about her that made her irresistible. She affected to be careless, impulsive, even infantine; but she was in reality profoundly false, and could be insolent, cruel, and domineering; a syren or a fury, as suited her humour or her purpose. There was no mercy in those voluptuous eyes that entranced while they deceived; no truth in those coral lips that smiled only to betray.

No sooner was she informed that the Duchesse de la Vallière would receive her, than she flew to the Hôtel Biron. Louise was astounded at her extraordinary beauty.

"How much I thank you, Marquise, for your

goodness in sparing a few hours from the gaieties of the Court to visit a poor recluse like me."

"On the contrary, Madame la Duchesse, it is I who am grateful;" and the Marquise kissed her on both cheeks. "Ever since I came to Court, I have longed to become acquainted with you. No words can express the love and respect I entertain for you."

"Alas! madame, I fear that you cannot know me. I deserve no respect," replied La Vallière sadly. "If you can love me, I shall be satisfied."

"Love you, dear Duchess! I will devote my life to you, if you will permit me such an honour," cried Madame de Montespan, her eyes flashing with eagerness. "Will you permit me to look on you as an old friend?"

"I shall consider it a privilege," replied La Vallière.

"I have so often talked about you with the Comtesse du Roule, that I feel already as though we were long acquainted," continued Madame de Montespan; and she seized La Vallière's small hand and pressed it. La Vallière returned her caress more quietly. "Dear Duchess," exclaimed De Montespan impulsively, "I am so young, so inexperienced."

"And so beautiful," added La Vallière, smiling.

"Well, I am told so, madame. Your counsel will be invaluable to me. I am yet but a novice at Court."

"I will be a mother to you," replied Louise meekly. But, in her inmost heart, she asked herself, "Am I indeed so old, so changed, that she can accept this offer from me? It seems but yesterday I was as young and as light-hearted as herself!"

"I know little of the Court now," replied La Vallière, speaking in a very subdued voice. "What I do know, can be of little service to you. Heaven guard you from my experiences!" and a deep sigh escaped her.

"Oh, Madame la Duchesse, wherever you are, *there* is the Court. Your modesty only adds to your merit. We all know *you* are the dispenser of all favour, all power—that your word is law." This was spoken rapidly by the Marquise, who all the while kept her eyes on the Duchess to study the effect of her flattery.

"God forbid," replied La Vallière coldly; and a look of displeasure contracted her brow for an instant. "I possess no power of that kind, madame. I would never permit myself to exercise any such influence over his Majesty, I assure you."

The crafty Marquise saw she had made a

mistake, and instantly set about repairing it. She sighed, affected an air of deep concern, and cast down her magnificent eyes. Then she timidly stretched out her hand to clasp that of La Vallière.

"Will you teach me your patience, your resignation? Will you teach me to bear sorrow?"

"Gracious heavens! what can a creature so young and brilliant know of sorrow?"

"Much. Alas! too much!" The beautiful Marquise raised her handkerchief to her eyes. "Monsieur de Montespan never loved me. It was a marriage arranged by my sister, Madame de Thiange. She sacrificed me to family arrangements; he to his love of play—he is a desperate gambler. Worse still, he is a libertine." She paused, and tried to blush. "Can I, dare I hope, Madame la Duchesse, to find a friend in you? Nay, more—a protectress? May I be permitted to ask your counsel?"

"Reckon on me," cried La Vallière, who was deeply interested by this artful appeal. Madame de Montespan cared no more for her husband than he did for her. "Come to me whenever you need advice, whenever you want sympathy or protection. Come to me freely—at all hours, at all times—this house is yours."

"But, Madame la Duchesse, his Majesty may perhaps object to my presence here. I do not think he likes me. He has scarcely once addressed me during the few times I have been at Court."

"Ah, I will arrange that," answered La Vallière, her face all aglow with excitement. "I will manage that you shall be here when he comes. To see you, dear Marquise, as I do now, must be to esteem and respect you. His Majesty's heart is so excellent, all his ideas so great, so noble! You shall help me to entertain him; you have such charming spirits, such a sunny smile."

Madame de Montespan gave a little start. She could with difficulty conceal the delight this speech gave her, La Vallière had so completely fallen into the trap she had laid. Again she kissed her thin white hand, and pressed the long delicate fingers that lay so confidingly in her own.

"What an honour!" she exclaimed. "How happy I shall be to serve you in the smallest way, in return for all your goodness!"

"To serve *me!*" repeated La Vallière, gazing at her vacantly. "Not to serve me—that is impossible. Ah, no one can serve *me*. My life is a long remorse. I love—with my whole soul I love. That love is a crime. I can neither leave the King,

nor can I bear to remain. God's image rises up within me to shut out his dear form from my eyes. Alas, alas!—I prefer him to God." La Vallière melted into tears. She sank back on her chair, lost to all else but the agony of her own feelings.

Madame de Montespan observed her with a look of sarcastic scrutiny. No shade of pity tempered her bold stare. Her eyes were hard as steel, her full lips were compressed.

"How I admire your devotion to his Majesty," she said, in the most insinuating voice. "It is extraordinary." Her kind words singularly belied her cruel expression, but Louise, blinded by her tears, did not observe this. "What astonishes me is that, feeling as you do, you can endure to remain here—so close to the palace, almost living in the Court, so long. In such magnificence too,"—and she gave a spiteful glance round the superbly decorated saloon. "You must have extraordinary self-command," she added artfully, "immense self-denial. I suppose you see his Majesty often, Madame la Duchesse?" she asked this question with well-affected indifference, fixing her eyes steadily on poor La Vallière, who still lay back in her chair weeping. "He is always at Versailles. It must be a great trial, and with

your religious convictions too." As she spoke she carefully noted the effect each word produced upon La Vallière.

"Alas!" replied her victim, her cheeks now suffused with a burning blush, "I see him almost daily. Those hours are all that render life endurable."

"Do you really mean this, dear Duchess?" returned Madame de Montespan, feigning extreme surprise. "I should have imagined that the refinement of your nature would have rendered the indulgence of a guilty passion impossible."

"Ah! I see you despise me," groaned poor La Vallière, overcome by shame. "I cannot wonder. Young and pure as you are, I must be to you an object of horror."

"Oh, Madame la Duchesse, what a word! On the contrary, I admire the sacrifice you make."

"Alas!" interrupted La Vallière, "it is no sacrifice. I cannot tear myself from him because—because—" she stopped for a moment, then added hastily, "I fear to give him pain. It seems to me I ought to bear anything rather than hurt one whose love has raised me so near himself. I have not the courage to wound him—perhaps to embitter his whole life. No,—although conscience,

duty, religion command it, I have not the courage." La Vallière turned aside and hid her face.

Madame de Montespan fell into a deep muse. Again an expression of cruel determination passed over her fair young face, and she gave La Vallière a glance in which malice, anger, and contempt, were mingled. La Vallière, absorbed in her own sorrow, did not perceive it.

"How I grieve for you, dear friend," Madame de Montespan continued, speaking in her sweetest voice. "How I respect your scruples. Are you sure," added she, carefully noting the effect of her words, "that the King would *really* suffer from your absence as keenly as you imagine?"

"I have never dared broach the subject," answered La Vallière, looking up. "My remorse I cannot hide. He knows I suffer, he sees I am ill. But I would not for worlds openly acknowledge that I wish to forsake him."

"Yet, dear Duchess, this struggle will kill you. What a balm to your sensitive feelings the solitude of a convent would be! Among those holy sisters, in a life of prayer, you would find new life."

"I know it—I know!" cried La Vallière passionately; "but how to leave him—how to go?"

"Perhaps, Duchess, I may assist you," and Madame de Montespan bent, with well simulated interest, over the slight form beside her, and gazed inquiringly into the trusting eyes that were turned so imploringly upon her. "I might be able to place this dilemma before his Majesty as your friend, dear Duchess. A third party is often able to assist in a matter so delicate. If his Majesty would indeed suffer as poignantly as you imagine, your departure is out of the question. I could at least learn this from himself in your interest."

Louise sprang to her feet, she threw her soft arms round Madame de Montespan, and nestled her pale face on her bosom.

"At last I have found a real friend," she cried; "at last I have found one who understands me. But," and she looked up quickly into the other's face, with a confidence that was most touching, "you will say nothing to his Majesty. Not a word. Be here when he next comes. (I will ask his permission.) You will then be able to judge for yourself—to counsel me. I would rather suffer torture, I would rather die, than give him a moment's pain—remember that," and La Vallière put out her little hand and pressed

that of Madame de Montespan, whose face was wreathed with smiles.

"Do you think that his Majesty will consent to my presence here?" asked Madame de Montespan, carefully concealing her feelings of exultation, for she foresaw what the reply must be.

"I will make him," cried La Vallière. "I will teach you exactly how to please him—what to say—never to contradict him—to watch the turn of his eye, as I do. The ice once broken, your tact, your winning manners, will make all easy."

Madame de Montespan acquiesced. She strove to appear careless, but she knew that her fate was on the balance. If she met the King there, she was resolved her rival should not long trouble her.

"Then you will tell me what I ought to do," continued La Vallière. "I shall be for ever grateful to you—you will reconcile me to myself!"

* * * * *

When next the King visited La Vallière, Madame de Montespan was present. She was as plainly dressed as was consistent with etiquette. At first she said little, sat apart, and only spoke when the King addressed her. But afterwards, gradually feeling her way, she threw in the most adroit flattery, agreed with all he said, yet appeared to defer

in everything to La Vallière. Sometimes she amused him by her follies, and brought with her a team of mice she had tamed and harnessed to a little car of filigree, to run upon a table; sometimes she astonished both La Vallière and the King by her acute observation, her daring remarks and pungent satire. The King's visits to the Hôtel Biron became longer and more frequent. If Madame de Montespan was not there he asked for her, and expressed regret at her absence. The Comtesse du Roule inquired anxiously of La Vallière if Madame de Montespan was useful to her. Reports had reached her which made her uneasy. It was said that this beautiful young friend, whom she had so unwittingly introduced to La Vallière, had designs of her own upon the King; and that she openly boasted that she would speedily supplant the Duchess.

Madame du Roule had also heard that Monsieur de Montespan had appeared at the Queen's circle dressed entirely in black, and that on being asked by the King for what relative he wore such deep mourning, had replied—

"For my wife, Sire."

La Vallière laughed at this story, and would not listen to a syllable against her new friend.

CHAPTER LIX.

BROKEN-HEARTED.

It was evening. The day had been intensely hot. Now, stormy clouds scud across the western skies, and the sun sets in a yellow haze, which lights up the surrounding woods. Groups of stately elms that tuft the park cast deep shadows upon the grass; their huge branches sway to and fro in the rising wind, which moans among the thickets of laurels and lilacs separating the grounds of the Hôtel Biron from the royal gardens of Versailles.

Louise La Vallière sat alone in a gorgeous boudoir lined with mirrors and gilding. She was engaged on some embroidery. As she stooped over the frame on which her work was strained, her countenance bore that resigned and plaintive expression habitual to it. She was still graceful and pretty, and her simple attire gave her the appearance of a girl.

As the failing light warned her that night was approaching, she put aside her work, seated herself beside an alcoved window which opened upon a terrace, and listened to the wind, each moment growing more boisterous among the neighbouring forests that topped the hills towards Saint-Cloud.

Suddenly the door opened, and Madame de Montespan appeared. After saluting La Vallière, she seated herself in an easy-chair opposite to her. Her bearing was greatly changed. No longer subservient and flattering, she was now confident, familiar, and domineering. Her eyes wandered round the room with a defiant expression. The very tone of her voice showed how much she assumed upon the consciousness of favour. She was more beautiful than ever; many jewels adorned her neck and hair which she had never worn before.

"Louise," said she, with an air which, if intended to be gracious, was only patronising, "I can only stay for an instant. How dismal you look! what is the matter?"

Louise shook her head despondingly. "Nothing more than usual."

"The Queen is just arrived from Saint-Germain; I am in attendance. I escaped for a few minutes, accompanied by the Comte de Lauzun. We came

through the gardens and the thicket by the private alley. You must not ask me to stay; her Majesty may inquire for me. Lauzun is waiting outside on the terrace by the new fountain."

"Will he not come in?" asked La Vallière.

"No, he is in attendance on his Majesty, who is engaged at this moment with the architect. He may call for him at any moment."

"Do you think I shall see his Majesty this evening?" asked La Vallière timidly, looking up and meeting the haughty stare of the Marquise.

"I imagine not. It is late, and his Majesty has said nothing of such an intention."

"Yet he is so near," murmured Louise sadly.

"Monsieur de Lauzun tells me that the flotilla of boats is ordered for this evening. There is to be a water party on the canal; the shores are to be illuminated. I trust it will not rain."

"How I envy you—not the water party, but that you will see the King," and La Vallière's eyes glistened.

"Adieu, adieu, *ma belle!* I can't keep Lauzun waiting," and Madame de Montespan rose and left the boudoir as hastily as she had entered it.

Louise had also risen to attend her to the door. She did not reseat herself, but stood

gazing wistfully after her. She anxiously bent her ear to catch every sound. Louis was close at hand; he might still come. A thrill of joy shot through her at the thought. Once the sound of footsteps was audible, and a flush of delight overspread her face. The sound died away, and again the night wind, sighing without, alone broke the silence. Her heart sank within her. She rebuked herself, but in vain; spite of remorse, spite of self-conflicts, Louis was dearer to her than life.

It was rapidly growing dusk; only a little light still lingered in the room. A feeling of utter loneliness, a foreboding of coming misfortune, suddenly overcame her. The shadows of approaching night seemed to strike into her very soul. She started at her own footstep as she crossed the parquet floor towards a taper which stood upon a marble table, covered with costly trifles given to her by the King. She stretched out her hand to light it. When she had done so, something sparkled on the floor close to the chair on which Madame de Montespan had been seated. Louise stooped down to see what it was. She at once recognised some golden tablets which she had often noticed in the hands of Madame de Montespan. The diamonds, set in the rich gold chasing, and the initials, had

caught the light. The snap was open. It was so dark that La Vallière held it close to the taper in order to close the spring. In doing so the tablets fell open—her eyes fixed themselves on the pages. An expression of horror came into them as she gazed. Could it be, or was she dreaming? All the blood in her body rushed to her heart. She put down the light which she had held, and, with the tablets in her hand, sat down to collect her senses, for her head was dizzy. Could it be? Yes; it was the handwriting of the King. How well she knew it—each stroke, every little turn of the pen, how she had studied it! As she passed page after page through her quivering fingers, each bore the same well-known characters. She tried to read; a film gathered over her eyes, yet she must read on. She pressed her hand upon her brow; her brain seemed on fire. At length a desperate resolution gave her power—she read. There were verses of passionate fondness, signed "Louis." The first dated three months back; the last only yesterday.

She would have wept, but the tears froze ere they reached her eyes. With a great effort she collected her scattered senses and began to think. Madame de Montespan must have dropped these

tablets on purpose. She saw it all. They fell from her hand upon the floor. Lying there she gazed at them in silence. Then she glanced round the room. It was now quite dark; the burning taper only served to deepen the gloom—Louise knew she was alone in the world; the King loved another.

With the composure of despair she took up a pen to address him before she fled, for fly she intuitively felt she must. She was not capable of reflection, but it came to her quite naturally as the only thing that rémained for her to do, to fly; and where could she go but to Chaillot, to the dear sisterhood?

"You have ceased to love me," she wrote; "the proofs are in my hand, written by yourself. The last time we met you told me how dear I was to you; let me never hear your beloved voice speak another language. I do not reproach you; you have treated me as I deserved. But I still love you as when we first met among the woods of Fontainebleau. If ever you waste a thought upon me, remember that death alone can quench that love."

Alas for the weakness of human nature! La Vallière, once within the walls of Chaillot, shut herself into the same cell she had before occupied,

and repented that she had come. "I ought to have seen the King, and to have questioned him myself. Madame de Montespan may have purposely deceived me. That she must be false I know too well. Who can tell if it is not all a device to rob me of Louis? I may myself be but a tool in her hands. If I had seen him all might have been explained. He is my master; I had no right to leave him. Oh! I wish I had not come!"

Thus she reasoned. Her soul was not yet wholly given to God. Further trials await her. Breathlessly she waited for what might happen; the creak of a door made her heart beat; every footstep made her tremble.

At the end of some hours the door opened and the Prince de Condé was announced.

"What, alone! Once he would have come himself," she murmured.

Composing herself as best she could, she rose to meet him. The Prince placed in her hands a letter from the King; he desired her to return immediately to Versailles with the bearer.

La Vallière meekly bowed her head and obeyed.

No sooner had La Vallière returned to the Hôtel Biron than the King arrived. He was ruddy with health; his eyes flashed with the vigour of

life. His bearing was proud, yet dignified. On his head was a hat trimmed with point lace and jewels, from which hung a fringe of white ostrich feathers, which mixing with the dark curls of his peruke, covered his shoulders.

"Let us live our old life again," said he, uncovering, and taking her hands in his. "I hate explanations. Believe me, your presence here, *under all circumstances*," and he accentuated these words, "is necessary to my happiness."

"But, Sire, Madame de Montespan?"

Louis became crimson; a momentary frown knit his dark eyebrows.

"I desire you to receive her as heretofore," he replied hurriedly. "Louise, it is a sacrifice you must make for my sake. You will not refuse. It will endear you to me more than ever."

As he spoke he looked at her tenderly.

"Sire, I cannot," she replied firmly, casting her eyes on the ground.

"How! You dare to refuse me? Louise, I command you." The King drew himself up; he laid his hand heavily on her shoulder. Then, seeing how wasted and frail she was, and how her slight form quivered under his touch, he added in a softened tone, "Louise, I entreat you."

A deep blush suffused her cheeks. Some moments passed before she could command her voice. "Sire," she replied at last, and her white lips trembled, "Sire, I can never again live the old life,—but I will obey you."

The King was about to rush forward to embrace her. She stopped him by a gesture gentle yet determined. He fell back.

"Sire, you love another. Hitherto I have quieted my conscience by the conviction that I was needful to you. Now I know it is not so. Take back these tablets, Sire. Can you deny these verses, written by your own hand but a few days since?"

Louis stood before her, silenced, confounded. Her composure astonished him. Before him was La Vallière—hitherto his slave, now so determined! Her hand rested on a table for support. She was deadly pale, and carefully avoided his gaze. He was deeply moved.

"Do I not offer you enough?" said he.

"No, Louis, it is not enough. I will obey you; I will receive Madame de ——" Her voice dropped, and the hated name was inaudible. "Nay, I will do more; I will again appear at Court if you command it, but all hope, all joy, is dead within me."

She uttered these words deliberately. It was despair that gave her courage.

Then she raised her eyes, and rested them for the first time on him, with an agonized expression. "I must have your undivided love as heretofore, or——" and she paused. "I know that my words are sinful," she added. "I have fled from you; now I am returned for a little space."

Louis looked perplexed. "But, Louise, believe me, that you are still inexpressibly dear to me; my heart has wandered, it is true, but you yet possess my affection, my esteem."

"It is not enough," repeated La Vallière in a low voice, "it is not enough. You are turned from me, you have joined in deceiving me; I am supplanted."

The tears sprang involuntarily into the King's eyes as he stood with folded arms contemplating her. He did not dare approach her. How strange it seemed that one so meek and gentle could be so firm. Never before had her lips uttered anything to him but words of tenderness.

Once more she spoke.

"As long as you desire it, Sire, I will remain. It is a penance I shall offer up to God, to remain and to see you love another." She turned her

large grey eyes up to heaven as she spoke. "When you give me permission, I shall become a Carmelite."

"I will never permit it!" cried Louis, stamping his foot upon the floor. A scowl passed over his face, he was angry, offended, at her obstinacy; his imperious will could not brook contradiction. "You have never loved me!" he exclaimed.

"Sire!" cried La Vallière. "Not loved you!"

"No; you have always preferred your religious scruples to me. You have tormented me with your remorse. You know nothing of the intoxication of passion. *You* ought to have gloried in my love, as others do," he muttered, in a low voice, turning from her.

"Sire," cried La Vallière, stung to the quick by his injustice, "I am at this moment forcing my conscience to obey you and to remain."

"You are too weak, too feeble, for a great passion," continued the King hurriedly. "Others can feel it, however."

"I have never sold myself for ambition, Sire, as others do. I never desired anything of you but yourself, and I have lost you."

Louis, crimson with passion, did not reply. He strode up and down the room in moody silence.

La Vallière for a time was also silent. Her eyes followed him. His face was hard, and no glance told her that he even pitied her. It was too much. The strain upon her gentle nature gave way. The pent-up tears rushed to her eyes, she burst into heart-rending sobs and sank upon a seat. The King watched her, but he spoke not a word. His look was stern and set. For a while her tears flowed fast, and her bosom heaved wildly. Then she rose to her feet, and approached him. "All is over!" she said, in a voice almost inarticulate with sobs. "Never—never—will I trouble your Majesty more. Your will shall be now as ever my law. Eternal silence shall cover my justly merited sufferings. I have nothing more to say. Permit me to retire." She turned and left the room; her heart was broken.

Bossuet was her director. To him she applied for counsel. She told him that her very soul yearned for a convent. Bossuet questioned her,—her passionate remorse, her penitence, her courage, her resignation touched him deeply. She seemed to be purified from all earthly stain. Bossuet advised her to take six months to consider her vocation, during which time she was to speak to no one of her project. La Vallière bowed her head

and obeyed. At the termination of the time, she publicly declared her intention of becoming a Carmelite. The King received this announcement with some show of feeling. He sent Lauzun to her, and offered to make her abbess of the richest convent in France. He entreated her not to expose her feeble health to the austerities of so severe an order. La Vallière replied that her resolution was unalterable. Before leaving the Hôtel Biron she asked for a private audience of the Queen. It was granted. With a veil over her face, and dressed in the dark robes of the order which she was about to enter, a hempen cord round her waist, to which hung a rosary and cross, she entered the Queen's private apartments at Versailles. Maria Theresa was alone. La Vallière raised her veil, her face was moist with tears, she tottered forward with difficulty and sank upon her knees.

"My royal mistress," said she, in a faint voice, "I come to crave your pardon. Oh, Madame, do not, I implore you, repulse me. Alas! if I have sinned I have suffered. Suffered—oh, so bitterly, so long! In a few hours I shall be forgotten within a convent."

The Queen, a woman of the most kindly and womanly feelings, was deeply affected.

"Ah, Madame la Duchesse," said she, "I have learnt to know how much I owe you. My life was much happier when you were at Court. I beg you to believe I shall be glad to have you again about my person."

"Your Majesty honours me beyond expression," answered La Vallière, curtseying to the earth.

"Does the King know of your departure, Madame la Duchesse?"

"He will know it after I have acquainted your Majesty."

"Surely he will not consent?" asked the Queen.

La Vallière shook her head—"My mind is made up, Madame. If I live for one year, I shall be a professed Carmelite."

"I am sorry," replied Maria Theresa simply, "very sorry. If my good wishes can serve you, Madame la Duchesse, you have them most sincerely. Should you, however, carry out your intention, allow me to present you with the black veil. It is a public mark of respect I would willingly pay you."

La Vallière was so overcome she could not at once reply, then kissing the Queen's hand which she held out to her, she said, "Your Majesty's goodness makes me hope that, as you have

deigned to pardon me, I may still, by a life of penitence, reconcile myself with God. I most humbly thank you."

This interview over, she returned to Versailles. She distributed her possessions as though she were already dead. She assembled her servants in her oratory and earnestly craved their forgiveness for all that she had said or done amiss. She exhorted them to be devout, to keep the fasts of the Church, and to serve God. She was thus occupied until past midnight. Towards morning she called her coach, and bid her people drive her quickly towards Chaillot. As she passed along she gazed eagerly on the blooming country for the last time. It was the month of June. The orchards were laden with the promise of coming fruit; the newly mown grass, sparkling with morning dew, made the meadows glisten, the birds carolled in the hedge-rows, and the hills, embowered in forest, rose green against the azure sky. Louise was still young; it was her last look on that world which had once been so pleasant to her.

At six o'clock in the morning she arrived at the convent. The Superior, accompanied by all the nuns, apprised of her arrival, was in waiting to receive her.

"My mother," said La Vallière, kneeling at her feet, "I have used my liberty so ill, that I am come to give it up into your hands."

Her long and beautiful hair was cut off before she entered the convent as a novice. A year afterwards she made her profession. The Queen and the whole Court were present—all save the King and Madame de Montespan. Bossuet preached his celebrated sermon. Then the Queen Maria Theresa descended from the tribune, where she had been seated in company with *La Grande Mademoiselle*, and invested her with the black veil. She kissed her tenderly on the forehead as she did so.

La Vallière, now Sister Louise de la Miséricorde, made an exemplary nun. She wore horse-hair next her skin, walked barefoot along the stone pavement of the convent, and fasted rigorously. She died at sixty-six, wasted to a skeleton by her austerities. Her end was peace.

CHAPTER LX.

M. DE LAUZUN AND "MADEMOISELLE."

On the line of rail to Orleans, two and a half leagues from Paris, is the station and village of Choisy le Roi. Of the enchanting abode once erected here, on the verge of grassy lawns bordering the Seine, nothing has been left by the revolution but a fragment of wall, built into a porcelain manufactory.

Choisy Mademoiselle, afterwards to be called by Louis XV. *Choisy le Roi*, was built by Mademoiselle de Montpensier, daughter of Gaston, Duc d'Orléans, under the advice of Le Nôtre. It was to serve as a summer retreat from the gloomy splendours of the Luxembourg; a *folie* where she might spend the summer heats, try her English horses, train her hounds, row on the river, tend her aviaries, and watch her flowers. Here, freed from all scrutiny, she could be imperious or devout, childish or solemn, vain or humble, as suited her fickle

humour; here she could lay traps to catch obstinate emperors who refused to wed, fast upon the most delicate morsels, *bouder* the Court when neglected by her Jupiter-cousin the King, and cultivate such remains of beauty as still lingered on her oval face and almond-shaped blue eyes.

At Choisy all was formal, to suit the taste of its mistress. The *corps de logis*, a pavilion in one story, a mass of lofty windows, was flanked on either side by conservatories and orangeries which masked the offices. Within, the entire south front was occupied by a gallery, with frescoed ceiling and cornice; the walls covered with crimson satin, on which hung the family portraits of *La Grande Mademoiselle*. Each name was written under each portrait, so that all persons looking on them might read the lofty lineage of this grand-daughter of Henry the Great. At one extremity of the gallery was a chapel, at the other a writing-cabinet. Here, the victories and conquests of Louis XIV., painted in miniature, by Vander Meulen, were arranged. These miniatures also were inscribed with names and dates. A likeness of his Majesty on horseback, when a youth, hung over the chimney-piece. Beyond the writing-cabinet was a billiard-room, as well as a suite of private apartments devoted to

the use of the Princess herself. Without, broad terraces were balanced by flights of steps, statues, vases, and trophies; *jets d'eau* rose out of marble basins, and precisely arranged flowers and orange-trees adorned the walks. There was a park of a hundred acres, with woods on either hand, trimmed to an exact resemblance of each other. Choisy, like its mistress, was in perpetual *costume de Cour;* nothing but the river, towards which the gardens sloped, was as nature had made it. Not even *La Grande Mademoiselle* could prevent the soft summer breezes from rippling its silvery current, the sun from playing vagrant pranks upon its wavelets, or the water-lilies from growing in wild profusion under the shadow of its tree-shrouded bays.

Besides Choisy, Mademoiselle possessed the Palace of the Luxembourg, before-mentioned, the Castles of Eu, d'Aumale, De Thiers, Dombes, Chatellerault, and Saint-Fargeau, surrounded by such vast estates, that no one except the well-known *Marquis de Carrabas* ever had the like.

Mademoiselle, although firmly convinced that the world was, in great measure, created for her particular enjoyment, was wonderfully exercised in her mind at the difficulty she experienced in securing that much-coveted game (for which she

had hunted all her life), an emperor, or even a king. She, however, appeased her wounded vanity by the conviction that she must be considered too masculine in understanding to consort with any living sovereign. Whatever happened, this royal lady never by any possibility could blame herself.

About this time, a Gascon gentleman of the Caumont family, whose name has been already casually mentioned, began to make much noise at Court. He was Captain of the Royal Guards, whose service was the special care of his Majesty's person, and Field-Marshal, also Governor of Berry. Loaded with honours, he had dropped the undistinguished patronymic of Peguillem altogether, and was known as the Comte de Lauzun. The King, whose understanding was, as a matter of course, superior to every one, had said when he was first presented to him at the Comtesse de Soisson's, that "Lauzun possessed more wit and penetration than any man in France." This opinion was accepted as law. That Lauzun was, by reason of his Gascon blood, cunning, heartless, and mercenary, as well as audacious, insinuating, and brave, is only saying that he was what all Gascons (going up to Court to make their fortunes) were. But that he

was above the ordinary hungry adventurer, the sequel will show. Holding Court trumps in his hand, he knew how to play them well. He was a little man, slight and well formed, with a dull, fair complexion, reddish hair, keen penetrating grey eyes, and a most insolent bearing. No one could call him handsome, no one could deny that he could be morose, vindictive, and cruel. He spoke sharp, hard words, affected a certain soldierly swagger, and was capable of being alike cringing and impertinent.

Mademoiselle was no longer young. The unsuccessful chase after an emperor had occupied a large portion of her life. She lived at Court, and was necessarily thrown much into the company of Lauzun, who affected an indifference towards her, a rough and ready manner that piqued her vanity. So she came gradually (no crowned head appearing in the matrimonial horizon, only relays of dukes and insignificant princes) to find Lauzun fascinating and original. The pleasures of the Court palled upon her; she became pensive, even sentimental, and often retired to bowery Choisy to meditate on the chances and changes of life.

Finally she came to the conclusion that marriage alone would restore her spirits. But marriage

without an emperor? It was a great come down, certainly. Yet there are no laws but the laws of passion in the kingdom of love. Mademoiselle reasoned that her sublimity was so exalted she could raise any man to her own level. In a word, she discovered that all earthly bliss depended on her marriage with Monsieur de Lauzun.

Now Mademoiselle was, as we have seen, a very determined, even masculine, lady. She had pointed the guns of the Bastille against her cousin the King; she had all but led an army into the battle-field. Having come to a determination, she proceeded incontinently to carry it out. But she encountered uncontemplated difficulties. The crafty Lauzun, who read her like a book, became suddenly respectful and silent. As she approached, he receded. Mademoiselle was extremely embarrassed, and more violently in love than ever. This was precisely what Lauzun intended.

We are in the Queen's apartments at the Louvre, within a stately retiring-room. The walls are covered with white brocade, on which is a gold pattern. They are panelled by gilt scroll work. On the carved ceiling, which is supported by

pilasters, is painted Apollo ushering in the day. The furniture is of green damask; colossal chandeliers of crystal and gilt bronze are reflected in mirrors placed at either end. Over the mantelpiece, which is carved and richly gilt, hangs a portrait of the King.

Mademoiselle, attended by her lady of honour, enters about the time of the Queen's lever. She finds Lauzun in a corner talking with the Comtesse de Guiche. He takes no notice of her, though she gives a slight cough to attract his attention. She does not like it. Besides not saluting her, which he ought to have done, he seems quite to have thrown off his usual *insouciance*, and to find the conversation of the Comtesse de Guiche much too interesting. Mademoiselle retires into the recess of a window, and watches him.

Lauzun continues talking with unaccustomed eagerness. He still takes no notice whatever of Mademoiselle; her royal highness has therefore to wait—yes, actually to wait; a thing she has never done in her life before to an inferior—until he has done talking.

But when he does approach her, he advances with such a noble air, he is in her eyes so handsome, that "To me," she says in her memoirs, "he

seemed the very master of the world." Not only does she forgive him, but her whole heart goes out to meet him, and her pulses throb violently —so violently, indeed, she is obliged to wait for a moment ere she can address him.

Lauzun makes her a ceremonious bow, places his hand on his embroidered waistcoat and point-lace *jabot*, at the place where, if he had one, his heart would have been, casts down his eyes, and awaits her pleasure.

Now, it must be specially borne in mind that Mademoiselle, much against her will, may be now called "*an old maid*," which condition may reasonably excuse her ardour.

"I flatter myself, Count," she says—blushing at her own backwardness, yet infinitely gratified at the same time by Lauzun's attitude of respectful attention—"I flatter myself you take some interest in me." She looks up, expecting some outburst of protestation at the studied humility of her language. Lauzun, his hand still resting somewhere in the region of where his heart ought to be, bows again, but does not reply. "You are a faithful friend, I know, Monsieur de Lauzun," continues Mademoiselle, confused at his perfect composure, and evolving in her own mind the impossibility of

saying all that she desires if he continues silent. "You are, too, a man of the world—" she hesitates. Still Lauzun is mute. "Even his Majesty has the highest respect for your judgment." Again she pauses, flushes crimson, not only on her cheeks, but over her well-formed neck and snowy shoulders. Lauzun makes a slight inclination, but otherwise maintains the same attitude. Mademoiselle's voice, ordinarily rather shrill and loud, is low and persuasive. She looks at him inquiringly, and stretches out both her hands as if to claim his special attention to what she is about to say. Lauzun appears not to observe her anxiety, and fixes his eyes on the ground. "Will you favour me with your advice, Monsieur de Lauzun? I shall esteem it a great kindness." Her tone is almost one of supplication.

"I am deeply sensible of the honour your highness does me," replies Lauzun, disengaging his hand from his waistcoat, and again bowing, this time very stiffly. "On what subject may I venture to advise your royal highness?"

Mademoiselle is conscious she has something very extraordinary to say. She hoped that, seeing her evident perplexity, Lauzun would have helped

her. Not a bit. She must trust entirely to herself. Her pride comes to her help. She remembers who she is, draws herself up, steadies her voice, and takes a few steps nearer to where he is standing.

"It is a very delicate subject, Monsieur de Lauzun; nothing but my confidence in your honour and your discretion would otherwise induce me to broach it. But——" and she falters.

Lauzun does not stir, only with the slightest perceptible motion he raises his eyebrows, which Mademoiselle perceives, and, fearing that he is impatient, speaks quickly.

"Do you know—can you tell me——" here she pauses; then observing that he makes a hasty gesture, she forces herself to proceed—"you, Monsieur de Lauzun, who are the confidant of the King, can you tell me whom he purposes me to marry?"

Having said thus much she is so overcome she would like to sink into a chair. There is none at hand; besides, she dare not leave Lauzun, so eager is she for his reply.

He raises his head and fixes his deep-set eyes upon her with a bold, cold gaze.

"I assure you, madame, I am absolutely ignorant of his Majesty's pleasure in this matter. I am

persuaded, however, from what I know of the elevation of his sentiments on all subjects, that he would desire you solely to follow your own inclination." A malicious twinkle comes into his eye, and he smiles almost as it seems in mockery.

Mademoiselle becomes more and more discomposed. Never had an interview been so difficult to manage. "Surely," she thinks, "Lauzun is not laughing at me!" Yet she is too much in love to drop a conversation which she is determined shall lead to an explanation of his feelings towards herself. All this Lauzun is aware of; he rejoices in intensifying her perplexity.

"Monsieur de Lauzun," she says timidly, playing with one of the soft curls that falls upon her neck, "I hoped you could have told me. I earnestly desire your acquiescence in the choice I am about to make. You must necessarily be interested in it."

An appealing look comes into her face; but she tries in vain to catch Lauzun's eye. "At my age," and she sighs profoundly, "persons rarely marry contrary to their inclinations. Every crowned head in Europe has solicited my hand. Until lately, however, my heart was free." She sighs again, and gazes imploringly at him. He must under-

stand her, she tells herself, but as his looks are bent on the ground she cannot tell. Lauzun inclines his head, and seems to await her further communications.

"I have seen no one to please me until lately," she goes on to say; "I love my country, Monsieur de Lauzun; I think I could only be happy with a countryman—one—" (something rises in her throat, and stops her utterance; she clears her voice)— "one whom I know well—whom I esteem—whose person and manners are agreeable to me; one with a high place at Court, and who possesses the esteem of my cousin, the King." All this is spoken significantly and with marked emphasis.

A delicious glow runs through her frame. Breathlessly she awaits his reply.

"Your highness speaks with admirable sense," answers Lauzun with great deliberation. "How many illustrious persons about the Court would be honoured by knowing your gracious sentiments. Permit me, madame, to make them public."

"Not for the world, Monsieur de Lauzun," exclaims Mademoiselle hurriedly. "I am speaking to you strictly in confidence." Her countenance has fallen, and she has turned very white. Lauzun

watches her under his eyelids, and enjoys her sufferings.

"Why should one so happy as your highness marry at all?" he adds, seeing that she does not speak.

"I am happy, certainly, if riches and royal birth can confer happiness," she replies thoughtfully; "but there are drawbacks, Monsieur de Lauzun. I wish to confer my wealth upon a worthy individual."

("Myself, for instance," says Lauzun to himself; "I shall be delighted to spend it; indeed, I intend to do so.")

"Many people," continues Mademoiselle, "at this very moment wish me dead in order to inherit it," and a sigh escapes her. "I am very lonely, Monsieur de Lauzun, very lonely." Her face assumes a melting expression, such as he had never seen on it before. What could she say to make him understand her? Thinking of this she sighs again very audibly. Lauzun knits his brows and affects to be lost in thought.

"That is a most serious consideration, your highness. I admit it had not before occurred to me. Permit me time to consider of it before I tender any further advice."

A thousand hopes rush into Mademoiselle's mind. "He understands me," she tells herself, "but my exalted position alarms him. He will propose to me when next we meet."

At this moment the Queen entered the withdrawing-room.

CHAPTER LXI.

A FAIR SUITOR.

THE following evening at her Majesty's circle Lauzun approaches Mademoiselle. A smile is on his face, and his manner is less formal. Mademoiselle seats herself apart in a recess, and signs to him to place himself beside her. "Now, now, he will speak," she repeats to herself.

"Are you prepared, M. de Lauzun, to give me your opinion on my approaching marriage?" The tone of her voice is low and sweet; her hand falls near his; he draws a little back.

"Believe me, madame, each word you have uttered is graven on my heart. I have founded many *châteaux d'Espagne* on them."

Mademoiselle is enchanted. "This is the moment," thinks she. She grows hot and cold by turns, and with difficulty conceals her delight.

"Pray speak to me with frankness, Count. I

want to discuss with you the most important event of my life—my marriage."

"I am deeply gratified at being appointed president of your council, madame." Lauzun's manner suddenly changes. He is all at once disagreeable, stiff, and supercilious. He settles his ruffles over his hands, and pulls at his moustache. "Allow me to say, however, that no one in the world could enter into this delicate matter with more profound respect for you than myself."

Mademoiselle is strangely baffled; spite of herself the conversation is drifting away, she knows not whither. She cannot decide if Lauzun is gratified or offended at her advances—a strange dilemma for a love-sick princess worth many millions!

"Pray, Count, let us resume our discussion of your own opinion on the matter in question. Do you advise me to marry?"

"Your merit, madame, is so great, I know no one worthy of you." He speaks with the utmost indifference. "Why resign your present brilliant position?" he adds.

"Is he mocking me?" she thinks, "or is he bashful?" As this doubt presents itself Mademoiselle's heart sinks within her. "What can I say to make him understand me?" she murmurs.

When she next speaks a slight asperity is apparent in her tone. She is not used to be trifled with; she cannot brook it even from Lauzun. She rises impatiently.

"I beg you will remember, Monsieur de Lauzun, that I consider no sacrifice too great to ensure me the husband I have described to you."

Lauzun feels that he may go too far; he instantly assumes a look of intense humility.

"Such a man as you describe, madame, ought to esteem himself supremely blest. He should love you more than life!" He speaks with enthusiasm. Mademoiselle thrills with rapture; her cheeks mantle with blushes. "At last the moment is come," she thinks. She reseats herself and turns, with breathless impatience, towards Lauzun, who meets her ardent gaze. Lauzun instantly checks himself; the cold look is again on his face.

"Where will you find such a man?" he says. "Will your highness permit me to search for one?"

"Monsieur de Lauzun, if you are in earnest you need not search long," she replies significantly. Could she then have caught his eye, all would have been told.

"Pray inform me on whom your choice has fallen,

madame? We may both have fixed on the same person."

Had she dared she would have openly named himself, but he is suddenly grown so cold and distant, she is utterly discomfited. Lauzun crosses his arms on his breast and falls into a muse.

"Have you ever, madame, contemplated the advantages of becoming a nun?" he asks abruptly. "Devotion is often the refuge of single women."

Mademoiselle is aghast. Her hands drop helplessly to her side, her head sinks on her bosom.

"Good heavens!" she thinks, "what evil fortune pursues me? Will no man ever understand I love him?"

"Upon the whole, madame, I advise you to remain as you are." Lauzun's voice is harsh, his sallow face is flushed. He is conscious of the difficulty of his position, with an ardent princess beside him, whose passion must be irritated to the utmost in order to induce her to overleap all obstacles. "It is too soon to yield," he thinks.

"I have the honour to tell you, Monsieur de Lauzun, I have selected marriage," rejoins Mademoiselle haughtily. She is fast losing her temper. Lauzun instantly assumes a deeply penitent air.

"For myself," he says meekly, "my only plea-

sure is in the service of his Majesty. I am fit for nothing else." As he speaks his dejected look sends a pang to her heart. "If I leave his Majesty, it will be——" he stops, Mademoiselle listens breathlessly—"it will be to enter a monastery. Nothing but my attachment to my royal master restrains me."

"Blessed Virgin!" ejaculates Mademoiselle, clasping her hands. "Who could have believed it?"

"I shall never marry," continues Lauzun. He hangs down his head, apparently overcome with despondency.

"How?—Why?" demands Mademoiselle eagerly. "For what reason?"

"Marriage has often been proposed to me, your highness, but there are insurmountable difficulties."

"Name them, I entreat you," she cries imperiously.

"My wife, madame, must be a paragon of virtue, or I should murder her. I dread the morals of the Court. Not the wealth of the Indies would tempt me to marry and to doubt. I would not unite myself to a princess of the blood, under such conditions."

"Noble heart!" exclaims Mademoiselle aside. "You can very easily find the virtuous lady you seek," she adds aloud, in a voice tremulous with suppressed passion. She turns towards Lauzun, and for a moment touches his hand which lies close to her own. "My choice is made," she adds resolutely. "I shall announce it to his Majesty to-morrow."

"For heaven's sake forbear!" exclaims Lauzun, with real earnestness, starting to his feet; "you make me tremble. You must say nothing. It concerns my honour, madame," and he smote upon his breast. Mademoiselle turns her glowing eyes upon him. "My honour as your adviser, madame, I mean," adds Lauzun, correcting himself and speaking in an altered tone. But all his self-command could not wholly conceal the triumph he felt at having so successfully acted his part. "As your adviser, madame, I forbid you to speak to the King. The time is not yet come. (I hold her," he says to himself, "she is mine!")

At this moment a page enters and desires him to join his Majesty, who is walking up and down in the quadrangle with some gentlemen. Mademoiselle is as much at a loss as ever to make Lauzun understand her. Just as a crisis approaches, they are

always interrupted. She longs to ask him why she should not tell the King? Once or twice she tried to do so, but Lauzun invariably turned the conversation into such a channel as effectually silenced Mademoiselle, who spite of her pride was easily abashed.

At last she hits upon an expedient.

"I have the name of my intended written on this slip of paper, Monsieur de Lauzun," she says, and she offers him a sealed note at their next meeting.

Lauzun draws back, stares at her and frowns. "I do not wish to take the note, madame. I feel that it forebodes me misfortune, my heart beats so violently." Still he stretches out his hand and takes the paper which she offers.

This takes place in the morning, at the Queen's lever. Maria Theresa is on her way to mass, accompanied by Mademoiselle, who is in a state of indescribable perturbation. She had seen Lauzun open the note, and read the paper, on which is written the magic words, "*It is you.*"

This great princess, arrived at a mature age, and as proud as Lucifer, trembles like a leaf during mass, and requires all the restraints of etiquette to hide the tumult of her feelings. After mass the

Queen goes to visit the Dauphin, who is ailing. Mademoiselle awaits her return in a gallery outside. Lauzun is there. He leans against the chimney-piece, lost in thought. A bright fire of logs is burning on the hearth. His countenance betrays nothing. He neither seeks nor avoids her. Mademoiselle rubs her hands, advances to the fire and shivers.

"I am paralyzed with cold," she says, in a soft voice. She bends over the fire. Lauzun bows and retires some steps to make room for her.

"I am more paralyzed than your highness," he says stiffly, looking round to see that no one is near. His face is inscrutable. "I have read the note you did me the honour to place in my hands. I am not, however, so foolish as to fall into such a snare; your highness is amusing yourself at my expense. You conceal the real name of your intended husband and substitute mine. You do this to mortify me. You are very cruel." He gives her a stealthy look. Mademoiselle staggers backwards; she supports herself against a chair. She does not know whether to laugh or cry. Then feeling that the moment so longed for is come, she collects herself and speaks with dignity.

"I assure you, Monsieur de Lauzun, the name

you have read on that paper, is the name of the man I mean to marry."

Lauzun shakes his head incredulously.

"Not only so, Monsieur de Lauzun, but I intend immediately informing the King of my intention, unless," adds she, in a tender voice, "you forbid me." She would have liked to have gathered into one glance all the love she felt for him. To have told him her passionate admiration for his person, her respect for his magnanimity in rejecting the splendid position she offered him. She would have liked to do this; but, in the face of such exalted independence, her womanly delicacy takes alarm. She can neither look at him nor utter a single word.

"Madame," says Lauzun at length, addressing her with the utmost solemnity, "you have ill recompensed the zeal I have shown for you. Henceforth, I can approach you no more. Great as is my respect for your highness, I cannot permit myself to be exposed to ridicule. You are, madame, making me the butt of the whole Court."

Mademoiselle starts violently, then she places her hand upon his arm. "Lauzun," she says, and her voice sinks into a tone of the humblest entreaty, "I beseech you to understand me. My

resolution may seem hasty, but your great qualities excuse it. I have made up my mind. I shall ask his Majesty's permission to marry you."

At last she has spoken! The woman has overcome the princess. Lauzun stands before her with downcast eyes—a victim, as it seems, to his own perfection. The time was now come that he must coquet no more. Placing his hand on his heart, he made her a deep obeisance.

"But, madame, I am only a Gascon gentleman. None but a sovereign is a fit consort for your highness."

"I will make you a prince, Count," rejoins she, with a tender look. "I will create you Duc de Montpensier. I have wealth and dignities; both are yours."

Her eyes sparkle, her cheeks burn. An air of mingled power, pride, love, and exultation overspreads her face. Her tall figure is raised to its full height; she clasps the hand of Lauzun; he raises it to his lips.

"Your highness overwhelms me," he whispers, with genuine feeling. For an instant, Lauzun—the cold, heartless Lauzun—felt her influence. Could he really love this exalted lady, who had thus honoured him? He looks fixedly into her

face, now transfigured by the deep passions that stirred her inmost soul. Could he love her? He, a penniless cadet, of an insignificant name? Etiquette set at defiance, a princess at his feet, enormous wealth, a royal dukedom in his grasp! Could he love her?—For a moment a rush of wild thoughts whirls through his brain. She worships him. He could make her life a long enchantment. He was about to kneel to her, to thank her, even to press her in his arms. But he stops and steadies himself. No—she is too old; wrinkles gather about her mouth, her fair hair is partly grey, the bloom has long faded from her cheeks, the fire of youth from her eye. What is she but an old maid, inflamed by a furious passion for a man greatly younger than herself? Should he, the brilliant Lauzun, burn incense on the altar of such an idol? Impossible. He would be the laughing-stock of the Court! His lively imagination grasps the whole situation in an instant. Lauzun's baser nature conquered. The momentary warmth fades out of his heart for ever. He heaves a sigh of relief.

"Monsieur de Lauzun," says Mademoiselle, far too much occupied with her own raptures to heed or to understand what was passing in his mind, "you

sigh. Fear nothing; I will obtain his Majesty's permission for our speedy marriage."

Would Louis XIV. consent to the marriage of his cousin-german with a simple gentleman? Would Madame de Montespan, with whom Lauzun had intrigued, fall into this arrangement, or would she use her all-powerful influence against it? These are awful questions. Lauzun's blood ran cold when he thinks of it. Madame de Montespan is treacherous, and as vindictive and clever as himself. Louvois, too, the minister, is his enemy.

Mademoiselle, however, ignorant of these dangers, acted without a moment's hesitation. She wrote a long letter to the King, announcing her choice, and asking for his consent. Lauzun saw and approved the letter. It was then confided to Bontemps, who carried it to his Majesty.

Louis did not vouchsafe an immediate answer. He sent word to his cousin that she had better reflect well upon what she was about to do. But the countenance of the royal Jupiter beamed upon his favourite Lauzun with undiminished warmth, and he was most affectionate to his cousin. Both naturally drew favourable auguries. Mademoiselle was now steeped in the sweets of an acknowledged passion. Lauzun condescended to be gracious, spite

of some little eccentricities such as not always approaching her, or even replying to her when she addressed him—eccentricities attributed by her to his great modesty and discretion. Still, the King had not given his consent.

One evening his Majesty played late at ecarté, so late indeed that it was two o'clock, and he was still at the table. Mademoiselle sat nodding on a brocaded fauteuil beside the Queen. She was determined to see every one out, and to speak to her royal cousin.

She longed so much to salute her lover Duc de Montpensier; to behold him raised to the Olympian circle that surrounded the family god. She longed for many things; life had of late become a delightful mystery to her. Each day unfolded some link in that delicious chain that bound her for ever to her adored Lauzun!

At last the Queen rose. As she passed by she whispered to Mademoiselle—"You must have some very important business with the King to remain so late. I can sit up no longer."

"Madame," she replied, rising, "it is a matter of life and death to me. If I succeed it will be announced at the council to-morrow morning."

Well, my cousin," said the poor Queen, who

never understood anything that was going on, and was not intended to do so, "I wish you all success. Good night."

By-and-by Louis left off playing. He rose, and walked up to Mademoiselle. "What, cousin, you are still here? You did not accompany her Majesty? Do you know the time? It is two o'clock."

"Sire, I wish to speak a few words to you."

The King yawned, gave a glance towards the door, then leant wearily against the wall. "Excuse me for to-night, cousin," said he; "I am tired."

"I shall not be long," urged Mademoiselle; "but do be seated, or I feel I cannot address you properly."

"No, I am very well thus. Speak, my cousin. I am all attention."

This was an awful moment. Mademoiselle's heart thumped audibly against her side. Her throat became so parched no words would come.

"Sire," she began, and her voice failed her. The King watched her; he had seen a good deal of women by this time, and understood their ways. He knew she was about to speak to him of Lauzun, and smiled.

"Take time, my cousin," said he graciously; "you are agitated; take time."

"Sire," again began poor Mademoiselle — fortunately her voice now came to her, and she continued—"I want to tell you that the resolution I had the honour of submitting to your Majesty respecting the Comte de Lauzun is unshaken. I shall never be happy unless I am his wife."

"Yet, my cousin, you have hitherto been most severe on those princesses who have married beneath their rank—your step-sister, Madame de Guise, for example. Lauzun is certainly the most complete grand seigneur of my Court; but I still advise you to reflect well upon the step you are taking. I do not wish to constrain you."

Mademoiselle clasped her hands; her face beamed.

"I love and esteem you beyond measure, my cousin," added Louis, taking her hands in his. "I shall rejoice to have you always about my person. But be careful; Lauzun has many enemies. I do not forbid you; but remember, a sovereign is often forced to act against his will. This intended marriage is now little known; do not give time for all the world to discuss it. Let me warn you and Lauzun to be cautious; above all, lose no time, my cousin. Take my advice, lose no time."

"Oh, Sire!" exclaimed Mademoiselle in an ecstasy, "if you are with us, who can be against us?"

Louis embraced her, and they parted.

Any one less infatuated than Mademoiselle, less arrogant than Lauzun, would have understood the King's friendly caution, "*to lose no time.*" But they were both too intoxicated with their different feelings to heed the advice of the really well-meaning Louis. Lauzun lost his head completely. He accepted, day after day, the magnificent presents sent him by Mademoiselle. He ordered fresh equipages, horses, jewels and plate. He was created Duc de Montpensier. He shrank from the amorous ardour of the doting Princess, but he gloried in her munificence. Still unmarried, he revelled in it without a drawback! He was a mean, selfish fellow, Monsieur de Lauzun, like all men who marry heiresses they do not care for. The words of warning came again, and this time to his ear. "*Marry while you can,*" was said to him. Mademoiselle, still enacting the masculine part, urged an early day, but she urged in vain.

CHAPTER LXII.

UNDER A COUCH.

About this time Lauzun, soon to become cousin-german to the King, solicited the distinguished post of Grand Master of the Artillery. Already he commanded the Dragoons, and was captain of the hundred gentlemen pensioners who guarded the person of the Sovereign; but this was not enough. The King readily promised him the appointment; but time went on, and no warrant came. Lauzun grew uneasy—specially as each time he recalled the subject the King evidently evaded it. What did this mean? Who was his enemy? He spoke to the favourite, Madame de Montespan, although he was well aware he had given her good cause for hating him. Madame de Montespan, with the most winning smiles, promised him her assistance. Still no warrant came. Again Lauzun ventured to recall his promise to the King at his lever, while handing him his feathered hat and cane. Louis turned

away his head, addressed the Duc de Roquelaure, and affected not to hear him. There was treachery somewhere! Lauzun shrewdly suspected Madame de Montespan. He would know for certain that very day, and if it were so he would unmask her. He offered a heavy bribe to one of her confidential attendants, well known to him in the days of their *liaison*, and prevailed on her to introduce him into the saloon, where the King would visit Madame de Montespan before supper, that very afternoon. Louis, who told his mistress everything, and consulted her about all important appointments, would be sure to mention Lauzun's renewed application of that morning. At all events Lauzun would chance it. He knew the lady was from home, having seen her start, in company with the Queen and Mademoiselle de Montpensier, for a drive to Saint-Cloud. He had handed his betrothed into the royal coach. No sooner had they started than Lauzun was admitted into Madame de Montespan's apartments by her friendly attendant, who assisted him in his arrangements, and who finally concealed him under a large couch covered with fine tapestry, on which Madame de Montespan usually sat. It was an undignified proceeding. He had to divest himself of his periwig and plumed hat, take off his richly

embroidered satin coat, tuck up his shirt sleeves, and crouch upon his hands and knees on the dusty floor. But these are trifles to a man bent upon revenge!

Shortly before the hour of supper, which their Majesties eat in public, Lauzun recognized Madame de Montespan's voice within her boudoir. Then he heard steps approaching. He could swear to the King's solemn tread and the sound of his cane tapping on the floor.

Almost before he could settle himself in the best position for listening the King was announced. At the same moment Madame de Montespan entered from her boudoir on the other side of the saloon. He heard her advance to the door and receive the King. She kissed his hand; Louis saluted her on both cheeks, and led her to the couch under which Lauzun lay concealed.

"Your Majesty looks vexed this afternoon," said Madame de Montespan in a softly modulated voice. "What has happened?"

"I am exceedingly annoyed about that affair of Lauzun," replied Louis, seating himself in an arm-chair. "He has again applied to me about the Artillery this morning."

Madame de Montespan leant back indolently

among the cushions, little dreaming who was crouching beneath so near her, and placed her feet upon an embroidered stool. A feather fan hung at her side, and as the weather was warm she took it up and moved it languidly to and fro, gazing absently at the King, who awaited her reply.

"Did you hear what I said, Athanase? I am annoyed about Lauzun."

"I heard, Sire; but what can I say? You already know my opinion on that subject. Need I repeat it?"

This was said in a careless manner, as she sank back deeper among the cushions.

(Lauzun was all ears. "She has given her opinion then," he said to himself. "I think I can guess what it was.")

"I promised Lauzun the place, remember," continued the King. "He certainly merits it; but your friend Louvois will not hear of his appointment. He torments me every time I see him to give the Artillery to the Comte de Lude."

"I certainly advise you," returned the lady, glancing at herself in an opposite mirror and arranging the fringe of small curls that lay on her forehead, "to be guided by the advice of so ex-

perienced a minister as Louvois, rather than listen to such an empty-headed coxcomb as Lauzun."

("Ah, that is the opinion you have of me, is it?" muttered Lauzun. "Now I know you, you traitress!")

"But remember, Athanase," said the King, taking out his snuff-box and applying the powder to his nose with great deliberation—"remember his attachment to me, his courage."

"His attachment to you, Sire!" and Madame de Montespan smiled ironically. "Do you believe in it?"

"Certainly. Then my word——"

"Bah! your word—that is nothing. Withdraw it."

("Ah! fiend," exclaimed Lauzun in a low voice, clenching his fists as well as his position allowed him; "this is the way you plead my cause, is it? Curses on you!")

"You need not fear for Lauzun," continued the lady blandly. "Mademoiselle will take care of his interests—the old fool!"

Madame de Montespan, in imitation of *La Grande Mademoiselle*, bridled, simpered, craned her neck, rounded her elbows, and stared superciliously under her eyelids. Louis laughed.

"Spare my poor cousin, Marquise. She is eminently ridiculous; but I love her sincerely. Her genuine affection for Lauzun touches me."

"For my part, Sire, I cannot understand how any woman can care for him. He is such a *petit maître*—ill-made, short, with a complexion like a lemon—altogether detestable. Not a man to my taste, certainly," added madame contemptuously, at the same time casting a flattering glance at the King, as much as to say, in his presence no other man could possibly be thought of. The King understood the glance and the compliment, and smiled upon her.

"The ladies are not on your side, however," returned he. "They all adore Lauzun. But about this command of Artillery—to whom am I to give it?"

("Now I shall know all the depths of your treachery, Athanase de Montespan!" said Lauzun half aloud to himself from under the couch.)

"Did any one speak?" asked the King quickly. "I thought I heard a voice."

(Lauzun bit his lips with vexation.)

"It must be my parrot, Sire," answered Madame de Montespan.—"In giving away so important a post you ought certainly to consult the welfare

of France. All personal considerations should be sacrificed." De Montespan spoke pompously.

("*Sacré Dieu!*" murmured Lauzun. "She is a female Judas!")

"What can the welfare of France have to do with this appointment?" asked the King, smiling.

("That is what I want to know too," whispered Lauzun. "Speak, serpent!")

"No man in France is better adapted to fill this post than Lauzun," added Louis gravely.

"How?" cried Madame de Montespan, sitting upright, and speaking in a shrill voice and with much animation, as the King seemed to vacillate. "How, Sire? Can you forget that dissensions between Louvois offended, and Lauzun imperious, (and you know, Sire, his overbearing temper, and how audacious he can be), must be exceedingly prejudicial to the State?"

"Spoken like an oracle!" exclaimed the King, looking admiringly at her. "What a head you have for business, madame! You are as beautiful as Venus, and as wise as Minerva!"

"You Majesty flatters me," replied the lady, casting an enamoured glance at him. "I only observe what is perfectly plain. I am sure your Majesty's penetration must have arrived at this

conclusion already. Remember, Louvois may resign, if you affront him," continued she, fixing her bright eyes on Louis.

"Now, all the fates prevent it!" cried Louis with alarm. "I should be lost without Louvois."

"Then you must at once refuse Lauzun!" cried De Montespan with decision.

("By heaven, I will be revenged!" muttered Lauzun, stung with sudden rage at her perfidy, in a louder voice than he was aware of.)

"Now I am certain I heard some one speak!" exclaimed the King, frowning, and turning his ear towards the spot from which the sound came. He paused to listen. "Athanase," said he, rising, and looking suspiciously at Madame de Montespan, "this is very strange. I demand an explanation." His Olympian brow was knit.

"Your Majesty is mistaken, you only heard my parrot in the ante-room. Surely you do not doubt me, Sire!" added she in a tearful voice, putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "Such an insult would kill me." Her bosom heaved. "Oh, Louis, you cannot love me if you entertain such unworthy suspicions." Sobs, real or false, here stifled her voice.

Meanwhile Louis rose hastily, and looked into

the corners and behind all the cabinets, as if determined to make a thorough investigation of the whole room. This would have rendered Lauzun's position desperate, and he positively shook with terror. Madame de Montespan still sobbed, her handkerchief pressed to her eyes.

The King took a few turns up and down the saloon, brandished his cane, and moved some chairs. The noise he made roused the parrot in the next room into a fury. It screeched so loud that for a time nothing else could be heard.

Finding no one, Louis, rather embarrassed, placed himself at a window. He looked back at the beautiful woman still weeping on the settee. "Come, no more tears, Athanase," he said tenderly, approaching her with a penitent look and taking the handkerchief from her face. "Let this kiss seal my pardon. But the voice was really so distinct. I thought for a moment——" Madame de Montespan fixed her eyes reproachfully on him. "Well, no matter. Then you advise me to refuse Lauzun the post he desires?"

"Certainly," returned the lady with decision. She was now quite calm and alive to business.

A knock was heard at the door. Several gentlemen in waiting, attended by pages, entered and

announced that supper was served and the Queen already at table.

"I must leave you, my angel," said the King, in a low voice, rising. "It is time you should prepare for the performance of Molière's play in the theatre arranged for to-night. Adieu, my adored Marquise. Forgive my want of courtesy," he whispered in her ear. "But the parrot's voice was so natural.—I will wipe off my fault in any manner you please."

"I ask for nothing, Sire," replied she in the same low tone, "but that you should refuse this place to Lauzun. Do this, and you are forgiven," and her eyes beamed on the King, who, after placing his hat, covered with a plume of snowy ostrich feathers, on his head, raised it, bowed to her, and kissed her hand. Then replacing his hat before he left the room with his attendants, he passed the outer entrance, where the *gardes du corps*, who never left him, presented arms.

Madame de Montespan passed into her closet.

When the saloon was empty, Lauzun, crimson in the face, foaming with rage, and much rumpled in appearance, emerged from his hiding-place. He hastily replaced his wig,—so hastily, indeed, that he put it on awry,—and dragged on his coat with such

violence that he tore off the priceless Malines lace ruffles. Oath after oath fell from his lips as he dressed himself. "You shall pay for this, devil of a Marquise! *Morbleu*, I will make you wince!" he muttered—for he dared not speak louder until he had left the room. This he did, closing the doors with the utmost precaution behind him.

The suite of rooms assigned to Madame de Montespan led by a corridor to the landing of the grand marble staircase of the south wing. On the other side and across this landing were the state apartments, situated in the centre of the palace. To reach them Madame de Montespan must pass this corridor. Lauzun placed himself behind the outer door, and awaited her. After a long time she appeared. Her hair, just touched with powder, was sown with diamonds. A necklace of large single brilliants, linked together with pearls, lay upon her neck. Her dress was of pink satin, woven with gold; the low body fitting tightly, displayed to the utmost advantage her exquisite form. Her train of violet velvet, bordered by pearls and *passementerie* of gold, swept the ground. She was a miracle of loveliness. Lauzun made her a profound obeisance. Taking the tips of her fingers within his hand, he kissed them, and begged permission to be

allowed the honour of escorting her across the landing to the state apartments. Madame de Montespan smiled; his delicate attention flattered her vanity. Her anger was appeased. The gay *sabreur* was returning to his allegiance. Lauzun was now, too, a personage, as the betrothed of Mademoiselle, and cousin to be of the King. She almost repented she had urged the King so strongly to refuse him the post of Grand Master of the Artillery.

Lauzun, speaking in the softest and most insinuating voice, now asked her if she had condescended, during her recent interview with the King, to remember his humble suit to his Majesty, for which he had recommended himself to her all-powerful influence?

"This very afternoon I have done so," replied she with the utmost effrontery. "Indeed, I have urged your claims so strongly upon both his Majesty and Louvois that I believe you will receive the appointment to-morrow."

"How kind you are!" answered Lauzun, affecting to smile.

"Yes," returned the lady, "after all my eloquence, Monsieur le Comte, you must be successful," and she gave him one of those glances

out of her serpent eyes, whose power she knew so well.

"Delightful!" rejoined Lauzun aloud. "I am quite satisfied." Then, placing his mouth close to her ear, while a Satanic look passed over his face, he hissed out, "Yes, I am satisfied, for now I have fairly unmasked you. You are the greatest liar in his Majesty's dominions!"

As he spoke her arm still lay confidingly on his. In a moment he had seized and crushed it violently. Madame de Montespan gave a piercing scream.

"Yes!" yelled Lauzun, planting himself before her—"yes, I will prove what I say. I have heard every word you said of me to the King. I was present—concealed."

"Ah!" shrieked Madame de Montespan, agonized with pain. She stopped, and leant against the wall for support. A look of real terror came into her face. She turned appealingly toward Lauzun, who stood before her glaring with passion, then, overcome by pain and fright, she staggered, and fainting, or affecting to faint, fell heavily upon the pavement. There Lauzun left her. Without calling for help, he strode rapidly down the grand staircase, and disappeared.

CHAPTER LXIII.

SIGNING THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT.

A DAY is at length fixed. The contract between Mademoiselle and Lauzun is to be signed at the Luxembourg Palace. Mademoiselle arrays herself in the white robe of an affianced bride. Lauzun is beside her. He is ostentatiously humble; indeed, he had never been thoroughly civil to her before.

As he enters the boudoir in her private suite of apartments he salutes her with his grandest air, and kisses her hand. Mademoiselle cannot take her eyes off him. Her senile transports are ridiculous; Lauzun feels that they are.

A table is placed in the centre of the room, at this table sits Boucherat, notary to her royal highness. He is dressed in the quaint, clerical robe, white bands, and short wig that still distinguishes his profession in France. The marriage contract, of portentous size, lies open on the table before him.

Boucherat, a tall, spare man, with a singularly doleful expression of countenance, looks discomposed, coughs several times, then, finding that no one attends to him, looks up. Mademoiselle is talking eagerly with Lauzun.

"Your royal highness,—" begins Boucherat, hesitating. "Will you permit me to address you, madame?" he adds in a louder tone, finding Mademoiselle pays no attention to him.

"What is it, my good Boucherat?" asks Mademoiselle, turning round at last towards him.

Boucherat rises to his feet. He bows, standing on the tips of his toes, then folds his arms. He is purple in the face, and appears to be suffering acutely, especially as, suddenly unfolding his arms, he rubs them violently together.

Lauzun laughs. Mademoiselle cannot altogether command her countenance.

"I have known your royal highness from a child," says Boucherat hurriedly, as though speaking between spasms of pain. "I have had the honour of serving your illustrious father, Gaston, Duc d'Orléans, as notary before your birth, exalted lady." Here Boucherat stops, gasps as if going into a fit, wipes his forehead with his handkerchief, and adjusts his wig.

Lauzun roars with laughter, and Mademoiselle contemplates the notary with silent amazement.

"I have the honour to say, great lady," continues Boucherat spasmodically, "that I have known you from a child. I have always obeyed you, blindly, as was my duty and my pleasure. I have obeyed you now, madame," and he utters a sound between a snort and a groan. "I have at your command drawn up these deeds, as you bade me. But," and he again stops, blows his nose violently, and makes a hideous grimace, "I cannot allow your highness to sign these deeds and contracts without presuming to ask you if you have fully considered their import." Here such a succession of twitches and spasmodic contortions passes over his countenance, that he looks scarcely human.

"I have well considered what I am doing, Boucherat," replies Mademoiselle loftily, advancing to the table and taking a pen in her hand.

Lauzun, no longer laughing, stands contemplating Boucherat, with a savage expression.

"Your highness — permit me," — pursues the notary, not seeing him. "Is it to be an *entire* donation of the princedom of Dombes, the county of Eu, the dukedom of——"

"Yes, yes, Boucherat, an entire donation," replies Mademoiselle, interrupting him.

She dips the pen into the ink and prepares to sign.

"An *entire* donation, madame?" gasps Boucherat, rising noisily to his feet, then re-seating himself, and repeating this several times in his excitement. "Let me caution your highness——" Another snort and a succession of loud coughs silence him.

"This good man will certainly have a fit," says Mademoiselle half aloud. "What can I do with him? Do not agitate yourself, Boucherat," and she turns towards him. She well knows his great fidelity and attachment to herself. "Have no fear. I know what I am about. I shall never be more mistress of my fortune than when I give it to this gentleman."

She turns round and glances fondly at Lauzun, who is standing behind her. She starts back at the furious expression on his face. He looks diabolical. His eyes are fixed on Boucherat. The pen drops from her hand.

"Believe me, madame, I—I have reason for my caution;" and again all human expression passes from the face of the notary in a succession of the most violent winks.

"How, villain! what do you mean?" cries

Lauzun, advancing. "I shall break my cane on your back presently."

Boucherat rises, looks for a moment at Lauzun, then at Mademoiselle, shakes his head, readjusts his wig, and reseats himself.

Mademoiselle had taken the pen—which Lauzun presents to her this time—again in her hand.

"Ah, your highness," groans Boucherat, "I have done my duty. God help and guard you!"

"Are these deeds as I commanded them, Boucherat?"

"Yes, madame; they are a donation, an *entire* donation, of the princedom of Dombes, the——"

"Be silent, scoundrel!" roars Lauzun, "or by heaven I will split your head open."

Boucherat shudders; his eyes seem to turn in his head; a look of horror is on his face.

Mademoiselle draws the parchment towards her.

"I sign here," she says, and she traces her name in a bold, firm hand, "Louise de Montpensier."

While she writes, Boucherat digs his hands into his wig, which, pushed to one side, discloses his bald head. Then with a piteous glance at his mistress, he flings his arms wildly into the air.

"Alas, alas! would I had died before this! the

princedom of Dombes gone—the county of Eu gone! Oh, madame!"

"Be silent, madman!" roars Lauzun, "or, *pardieu*, I will throttle you."

* * * * *

The folding-doors leading into the state apartments are now thrown open. Mademoiselle appears, led by the Comte de Lauzun. These state apartments had been decorated by her grandmother, Marie de Medici, who had lived in this palace. The walls are ornamented with delicate arabesques, panelled with golden borders, and painted above in compartments. The vaulted ceilings are divided into various designs, executed by Rubens, illustrating the life of his royal mistress. Around hang the effigies of the Medici and the Bourbons, the common ancestors of Marie de Medici and her granddaughter.

Mademoiselle passes round the brilliant circle which forms itself about her, still holding Lauzun by the hand.

"Permit me," says she, in her stateliest manner, taking her position at the top of the throne-room under a canopy—"Permit me to present to you my future husband, the Duc de Montpensier. Let me beg all of you in future to address him by that title *only*."

The royal princes present and the great personages of the Court bow their acquiescence. The Maréchal de Bellefonds advances and salutes Mademoiselle.

"Permit me, madame," says he, addressing her, "to congratulate you in the name of your highness's devoted friends. I desire to thank you especially in the name of the nobility of France, whom I represent, for the honour you are conferring on our order by choosing from amongst us a consort to share your dignity. We esteem Monsieur de Lauzun one of the brightest ornaments of the Court; he is worthy of the proud station for which you have selected him."

"I thank you, Maréchal de Bellefonds, and I thank the nobility of France whom you so worthily represent. I thank you from my heart," and Mademoiselle curtseys with royal grace. "No one is so well acquainted as myself with the merit of Monsieur de Lauzun," and she glances proudly at her future husband. "I accept with pleasure the sympathy of his friends."

Lauzun bends, and kisses the hand of his affianced wife.

Then the Maréchal de Charost steps forth from a glittering crowd of officers. Charost is a captain in the royal body-guard.

"I must also thank your highness for the honour you confer on the army of France. My post is now without price; for what would a soldier not give, what sacrifices would he not make, to become the brother-in-arms of the husband of your highness?"

A laugh follows this hearty outburst of enthusiasm. It is scarcely audible, but Mademoiselle instantly suppresses it with a frown. Lauzun is a sacred object in her eyes, and she permits no jests, however flattering, to mix with his name. Turning towards the Maréchal de Charost, she replies with haughty courtesy—

"I thank you, Maréchal, and, in your person I thank the brave army of his Majesty, my cousin."

Before this august company separates it is announced that the marriage contract is to be at once submitted to the King, Queen, the Dauphin, the Duc d'Orléans, and the princes of the blood-royal.

The marriage is to take place next day at Charenton, at the villa of the Marquise de Créqui. The Archbishop of Rheims is to officiate.

CHAPTER LXIV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

MEANWHILE, Madame de Montespan expatiated to all the Court on the impossibility of an alliance between Mademoiselle and the Comte de Lauzun. That Lauzun should be received as a prince of the blood would, according to her, for ever lessen that dignity so dear to the heart of the monarch.

Louvois, her creature—some said her lover—spoke more strongly. Not only France, he said, would be eternally disgraced, but his Majesty would be personally censured in every Court in Europe, for permitting one of his nearest relatives thus to demean herself. Monsieur, father of Mademoiselle, declared that such an alliance would be an affront to the memory of his daughter's illustrious grandfather, Henry the Great. Nobles and ministers, incited by Louvois, threw themselves at the King's feet. They implored him not to cloud his glorious reign by consenting to such

a *mésalliance.* The poor weak Queen, worked upon by the artifices of the malicious De Montespan, who, as superintendent of her household, was constantly about her person, complained loudly of the insult about to be put upon her circle—she a royal daughter of Spain! All the princesses of the blood joined with her. The cabal was adroitly managed. It attacked the King's weak side. No man was ever such a slave to public opinion, or so scrupulously regardful of appearances, as Louis XIV. To him the *vox populi* was indeed "the voice of God."

About eight o'clock that evening, Mademoiselle was summoned to the Louvre from the Luxembourg. "Was the King still at cards?" she asked the messenger.

"No; his Majesty was in the apartments of Madame de Montespan, but he desired to see her highness the instant she arrived."

As Mademoiselle drove into the quadrangle, a gentleman in waiting approached her coach, and begged her to enter by another door, leading directly into the private apartments. This mystery seemed to her excited imagination full of evil import. When she reached the King's cabinet, some one ran out by another door. It was Madame de Montespan. The King was sitting over the

fire. His head rested on his hand. Mademoiselle stood before him trembling all over.

"My cousin," said the King at length, rising and offering her a seat beside his own, "what I have to tell you makes me wretched."

"Good God! Sire, what is it?" asked Mademoiselle in a hoarse voice. She had turned as white as the dress (that of an affianced bride) she wore. Her eyes were fixed upon the King in a wild stare.

"Calm yourself, my cousin," said Louis solemnly. "It is said by my ministers that I am sacrificing you, my relative, to the interests of my favourite Lauzun. I am also informed that Lauzun declares he does not love you—that it was you who offered yourself to him in marriage!"

Mademoiselle clasped her hands, then pressed them on her forehead. "Not love me?" she cried. "What a base lie! Lauzun tells me he adores me."

"Nevertheless, my cousin, such reports must have some foundation," resumed the King, speaking with great gravity. "They compromise me in my royal person; they tarnish the glory of the Crown of France, which I wear." His look and manner from grave had become overbearing and pompous. It was

quite evident that whatever touched his own position he would ruthlessly sacrifice. "My cousin, I have to announce to you that I cannot permit this marriage." He spoke in a loud grating voice, raised his eyes to the ceiling, stroked his chin with his hand, and seemed to swell with self-consciousness.

A ringing scream was heard from Mademoiselle. She lay back on her arm-chair motionless.

Having asserted his dignity, and conveyed in proper terms to his cousin that neither her entreaties nor her sufferings could for an instant be considered when they encroached upon his royal state, Louis relaxed his rigid attitude, condescended to turn his eyes downwards upon poor Mademoiselle, and in a voice kind, spite of his sublimity, added—

"I am very sorry for you, my cousin, very sorry. You have good cause to complain of me; but my duty as King of France is supreme. I cannot permit you to espouse the Comte de Lauzun."

"Ah, Sire—" groaned Mademoiselle, in a voice so choked by agitation it sounded strange in the King's ears, and made him shudder; (for his selfish nature instinctively caused him to shrink

from every species of suffering). She held out her hands supplicatingly towards him, and vainly essayed several times to speak. "Ah, Sire," she said at last in a voice scarcely audible, "you cannot withdraw your word—the word of a King. Consider,—" and she stopped and burst into an agony of tears. "Consider, my cousin, no one can have anything to do with my marriage but myself."

No sooner had she uttered these words than Louis drew himself up; the long curls of the full-bottomed wig which covered his shoulders vibrated, and the diamond star he wore on his coat of peach-coloured satin glistened, so sudden had been his action. At the same time, such a stony look came into his hard face, as gave him the aspect of a statue.

"Excuse me, my cousin, my royal dignity, the splendour of my Court, the esteem of every crowned head in Europe are implicated. You seem to forget that you are born a *daughter of France.* But, madame, I remember it, and I shall shield my royal name from dishonour!"

Overcome as was Mademoiselle, she perceived the mistake she had made. Her brain reeled, her limbs quivered convulsively, but she staggered to her feet.

"Oh, Sire, hear me!" she cried. "Let me implore you," and she threw herself before him and clasped his knees, "do not, do not forbid me to marry my beloved Lauzun. No ordinary rule applies to him. Lauzun is good, great, heroic! Oh! who would become a royal position like Lauzun?"

Louis did not reply. Having sufficiently asserted his dignity, he no longer restrained his kindlier feelings. He put his arms round his cousin, and tried to raise her from the ground.

"No, no; let me kneel," cried she passionately, clinging to him, "until you have recalled those dreadful words. Sire, I have ever respected and loved you. I have lived beside you as a sister. Do not—oh! do not make my life desolate. For God's sake, let me spend it with the only man I ever loved! A man so made to love. Kill me! kill me! my cousin," and she wrung her hands convulsively; "but, if I am to live, let me live with Lauzun. I cannot—I will not give him up!"

Louis rose from the arm-chair on which he was seated. He knelt on the floor by her side. He again took her in his arms, and laying her head upon his breast, he soothed her like a child. Big

tears rolled down his cheeks. He called her by every endearing name to comfort her. He did all, save consent to her marriage.

Mademoiselle was drowned in tears. Vainly did she, turning her swollen eyes upon the King, who soothed her so fondly, strain her ears to hear that one little word which was to dry them. She listened in vain; that word was never to be spoken. At last, faint with emotion, she signed to the King to raise her up, which he did, placing her on a chair. He kissed her burning forehead, and pressed her dry hands in his.

"My cousin," he said, "do not blame me. Rather blame yourself. Why did you not take my advice? I told you to lose no time. To marry at once. You should have done so. Why did you give me time to reflect—time for others to reflect? You ought to have obeyed me."

Mademoiselle dared not confess that it was Lauzun's fault she had not done so, but at this recollection a fresh burst of grief choked her utterance.

"Alas, Sire," she moaned at last, "when did you ever break your word before? Could I believe you would begin with me? To break your word, too, in such a manner!"

As Louis listened to her, he knit his brows, and looked gloomy and embarrassed.

"I am not my own master," he replied coldly, "in affairs touching my house and the honour of my race."

"Sire, if I do not marry Lauzun," groaned Mademoiselle, almost inaudibly, "I shall die. I never loved any other man. I ask my life of you, cousin. Do not take my life. You are sacrificing me to a court intrigue," she added faintly, catching at his hand, for she was fast losing heart; "but believe me, and let others know, that much as I love and respect your Majesty, and desire to obey you, I will never, never marry another man." Holding the King's hand, she kissed it, and gazed imploringly at him.

"Dear cousin, do not be so unhappy," he replied, at a loss what answer to make to such a home-thrust, which he knew to be so true. "Believe me, your obedience in this matter of Lauzun will make you doubly dear to me. You can command me in all other ways."

"Nothing—nothing can give life a value without Lauzun!" broke in Mademoiselle vehemently.

"My cousin," answered the King gravely, "I cannot permit you to be sacrificed. You are made

a tool of. I cannot permit it. Now," he continued, rising,—and with difficulty suppressing a yawn —"you can have nothing more to say to me. I shall not alter my determination."

Mademoiselle wrung her hands, the King drew her to him, and kissed her on the forehead. As he did so, a tear dropped upon her cheek.

"Oh, Sire!" cried Mademoiselle, "you pity me, and you have the heart to refuse me! You are the master of my fate. Have mercy on me! Do not give heed to others. Ah, Sire, you are destroying me!"

"Come to me to-morrow, my cousin," said Louis soothingly, much affected, but unshaken by her prayers. "Come and tell me you have forgiven me. Now, good night," and again he tenderly embraced her. Then he summoned his attendants to conduct her to her coach.

* * * * * *

Lauzun had played deep for a great prize, and he had lost the game. He broke out into savage abuse, and called the King opprobrious names. Absolutely maddened by rage, he rushed to the palace. He was refused admittance. Yet he swore and cursed at the attendants until he forced them to let him pass. Then he strode up-stairs to the

apartments of Madame de Montespan. Here he found the King seated by her side.

Louis rose, placed himself in front of the Marquise, and faced him with a look of the gravest displeasure.

"Sire," cried Lauzun, his face swollen with passion, "I am come to ask you what I have done that you should dishonour me?"

"Come, come, Lauzun," replied Louis, still standing before Madame de Montespan; "calm yourself."

Lauzun was too deep in the royal secrets to make an open breach with him either advisable or safe.

"No, Sire," roared Lauzun, emboldened by the King's calmness; "permit me to say I will *not* calm myself. I will not permit this humiliation. There is my sword," and he drew it from its scabbard; "your Majesty has made me unworthy to wear it. Take it—take my life also."

Lauzun presented his sword. The King put it from him with an imperious gesture.

"Comte de Lauzun," said he with dignity, "I refuse to accept your sword. Let it still be drawn in my service. There is much to wound you in what has passed. I feel deeply for you. But my duty as King of France compels me to act as I have done."

This was a bold assertion in the presence of Madame de Montespan, who sat motionless behind the King, her cheeks blanched at the thought of what revelations Lauzun might make in his rage.

"I will make what recompense I can to you," continued the King. "You shall be raised, Comte de Lauzun, so high that you shall cease to remember this marriage you now so much desire."

"Sire, I will accept no gifts, no honours, from a monarch who has forfeited his word. Ay, Sire, I repeat it deliberately," seeing the King's glance of fury at his insolence, "forfeited his word. Here do I surrender this sword, which your Majesty conferred on me. Here do I break it, Sire, in your face as you have broken your word."

As he spoke, he bent his knee, snapped the blade in two, and violently dashed the fragments on the ground at the King's feet.

"And you, perfidious woman," he continued, addressing Madame de Montespan, "of whom I could reveal so much, whose treachery I have proved—you who sit there unmoved—behold your handiwork! Do I not know that it is you, who, for your own wicked purposes, have influenced my royal master against me?"

Lauzun spoke so rapidly that all this had been said before Louis could stop him.

"Comte de Lauzun," broke forth the King in a voice unsteady with passion, "leave me —leave the palace, I command you. Presume not to insult Madame de Montespan in my presence, or"—and he put out his hand, grasped the gold-headed cane which lay beside him, and strode up to where Lauzun stood, crimson in the face—"or I shall chastise you as you deserve!" and Louis brandished the stick in the air.

Then, as if thinking better of it, his uplifted arm dropped to his side, he drew back some steps, flung away the cane to the farthest corner of the room, and, with a great effort, collected himself.

"Leave me!" he exclaimed, in a voice he strove with difficulty to render calm. "Leave me instantly, while I can still command myself. Go," and he extended his hand with authority, "go, until you learn how to address your Sovereign."

Notwithstanding these altercations, Mademoiselle de Montpensier did not leave the Court. She was gracious to all who approached. She looked happy, even radiant. Lauzun, also, after a short absence, resumed his service about the King's person. He was sleek, prosperous, and more haughty than

ever. All this was very strange. That vindictive beauty, Madame de Montespan, could not understand it. Her vengeance after all had failed. The matter must be looked into. Spies were immediately set. Every means of inquiry the State could command was brought to bear on Lauzun and the Princess. Their secret was soon discovered. *They were married!*

Madame de Montespan rushed to the King, and announced the tremendous fact. Lauzun was instantly arrested, and imprisoned at Pignerol. Mademoiselle, plunged in the depths of despair, left the Court for her Château of Eu, on the coast of Normandy.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE ROYAL GOVERNESS.

It was the King's habit, when at Saint-Germain, to hear early mass in the chapel. On his return, he passed through the great gallery in which the Court was assembled, to make their morning salutations to him. There he also received the petitions of all who had sufficient interest to gain admittance. A woman, tall, finely formed, and of ample proportions, with a stealthy glance out of magnificent black eyes, a well-curved mouth, and a composed and dignified bearing,—quite a style to suit the royal taste,—with a black silk scarf edged with lace thrown over her head, and wearing a dress of common materials, but skilfully designed to set off her rounded figure to the best advantage, presented herself before him. In her hand she held a petition, at the top of which, in large letters, was written: "The Widow Scarron most humbly prays his Majesty to grant———"

Louis read no more; his eye was gratified by the petitioner, not by the petition, which he put into his pocket and forgot. But the lady appeared so often, standing in the same place in the gallery of Saint-Germain, that his Majesty grew weary of her sight. At length he turned his back upon her.

Françoise d'Aubigné, of the Protestant family of that name, had married in her youth the poet Scarron—a dwarf, deformed and bedridden, a lover of loose company, and a writer of looser songs—for her bread. Scarron drew up the marriage contract without the assistance of a notary. The dower of Françoise was four pounds a year, two large black eyes, a fine bust, well-shaped hands, and a great deal of *esprit*. Scarron covenanted to contribute a hump on his back, plenty of brains, and a pension granted to him by the Queen-Regent, Anne of Austria, as *le malade de la Reine*. He regretted he could not offer either hands or feet, both being paralyzed. But he can assure his *fiancée* of a dower which she will gladly accept—*Immortality:* a prediction made in derision, which was strangely justified by events.

In the house of her husband, this enticing daughter of the d'Aubignés learned early "to be all

things to all men." She copied her husband's ribald songs for him, she entertained his promiscuous circle of friends—the gross Villarceaux, Ninon de l'Enclos, Mademoiselle de Scuderi, a lady of the highest virtue, but who affected Bohemian society, and many others.

In process of time, Madame Scarron's youth, beauty, and talents opened to her the salon of the Maréchal d'Albret, where she made the acquaintance of Madame de Sevigné, and Madame de Chalais, to become the Princesse des Ursins. She also made a much more important acquaintance in Madame de Montespan. When Scarron died, she found herself without a resource in the world. The King had disregarded her petition. By her friends' interest she obtained a place in the household of the Princesse de Nemours, affianced to the King of Portugal. Before quitting France, she called on all she knew. Among others, she visited Madame de Montespan. To her she related her ill-success at Saint-Germain.

"Why did you not come to me?" asked the favourite. "I would have protected you. I will now take charge of your petition, and I will see that his Majesty reads it."

"What!" cried Louis, when he saw the well-

known name, "the Widow Scarron again? Why, I am deluged with her petitions. She is become a Court proverb, 'as importunate as the Widow Scarron.' What do you know of the Widow Scarron, Athanase?"

The petition for the pension was nevertheless granted, and *la Veuve Scarron*, notwithstanding many scandalous reports of the past, was appointed governess to the illegitimate children born to the King and Madame de Montespan. Her devotion to her charges was extraordinary. The King, an attached father, was favourably impressed. He showed his approbation by a liberal allowance, out of which was purchased the château and estate of Maintenon, lying in a picturesque valley beside a river, sheltered by hills, in a woodland district between Versailles and Chatres. From this time the Widow Scarron was known as the Marquise de Maintenon, and became a devout Catholic. She had her own apartments at Court, and cut all her disreputable friends. She was constantly present when the King visited Madame de Montespan.

In the meantime, Mademoiselle de Montpensier returned to Court. Louis XIV. could not tolerate the absence of any of the princes and princesses of

the blood-royal, stars of the first magnitude in that heaven where he blazed forth the centre of life and light. Louis had sent a message to her. Mademoiselle therefore dried her eyes, and appeared in her usual place in the circle. Surely, she thinks, the King will appreciate the sacrifice she is making in being present at festivities which, by recalling so vividly the image of Lauzun, drive her to despair!

A ballet is to take place at Versailles; the King is to dance. Mademoiselle forces herself to be present. She looks old, sad, and ill. She is preoccupied. Her thoughts are with Lauzun, in the mountain-bound fortress of Pignerol. There is but one person present in that vast company she cares about. With him she yearns to speak. It is d'Artagnan, Captain of the Musketeers, who accompanied Lauzun to Pignerol.

D'Artagnan, a Gascon, is a countryman of Lauzun. He perfectly understands the part he has to play with Mademoiselle; a part, indeed, he had carefully rehearsed with Lauzun while they were together. All the time the ballet lasts, d'Artagnan, in immediate attendance on the King, keeps his eyes fixed on Mademoiselle with a sorrowful expression. This agitates her extremely;

she has the greatest difficulty in keeping her seat beside the Queen.

Supper is served in the Queen's apartment. Louis and Maria Theresa sit under a canopy of cloth of gold. Hundreds of wax lights blaze in gilded stands, and the King's twenty-four violins play. The Dauphin, Mademoiselle, and all the princes and princesses of the blood present, are seated at the table. The ushers and attendants admit the public to gaze at their Majesties. Every well-dressed person can enjoy this privilege, and the staircases and passages are filled with crowds ascending and descending.

When the tedious ceremony is over, Mademoiselle places herself near the door, and signs to d'Artagnan to approach.

"Ah, Captain d'Artagnan, I saw you looking at me all the time of the ballet," she says, with a sigh.

D'Artagnan, a bluff, soldierly fellow, but crafty withal, and shrewd, a good friend and a bitter hater, salutes her respectfully.

"D'Artagnan," continues Mademoiselle, moving closer beside him, and dropping her voice into a whisper, "you have something to tell me. I see it in your face. You accompanied Monsieur de Lauzun to Pignerol. Tell me everything you can

remember." Her manner is quick and hurried, her breath comes fast.

"Your highness, I left the Comte de Lauzun in good health."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Mademoiselle, clasping her hands.

She feels so faint she is obliged to ask the Queen's permission to open a window.

"Was he indisposed on his long journey?"

"No, madame; he was perfectly well. I never left him. Even at night I slept in the same chamber. Such were my instructions."

"Did he speak to you of me?" asked Mademoiselle in a faltering voice, blushing deeply.

"Constantly, your highness. He spoke of you with the utmost devotion. Next to the grief Monsieur de Lauzun felt at parting from your royal highness, I am persuaded he suffered most from the displeasure of his Majesty."

"Proceed, I entreat you," breaks in Mademoiselle eagerly. "Every word you say is inexpressibly precious to me. When did Lauzun first speak to you of me, and what did he say?"

"I must tell you," continues the artful d'Artagnan, watching her as a cat does a mouse—"I must tell your highness that before these unfortunate

events I had avoided the Comte de Lauzun. I imagined he despised every one."

Mademoiselle shakes her head.

"Proper pride — a conscious superiority," she murmurs.

"Well, madame, when he was arrested on St. Catherine's day, at Saint-Germain, the Comte de Rochefort brought him into the guard-room, and consigned him to me. I started at once with him on his journey to Pignerol. From time to time he gazed at me, but did not utter a single word. When we passed your villa at Petit Bourg, he groaned, and tears gathered in his eyes."

"Poor Lauzun!" says Mademoiselle softly, lifting up her eyes.

"'That villa," said the Count to me, 'belongs to Mademoiselle. Words cannot tell what I owe her. She is as good as she is great.'"

"Did Lauzun really say this?" asks Mademoiselle, with melting eyes.

"He did, madame," rejoins d'Artagnan with secret exultation at seeing how the bait is swallowed. "'I am unhappy, Captain d'Artagnan,' he went on to say, 'unhappy, but not guilty. I have served my King faithfully. I have worshipped Mademoiselle—not for her wealth, but for herself.'"

Mademoiselle puts her handkerchief to her eyes. She is convulsed with suppressed sobs.

"Yes, madame; this and much more was said by the Count. Indeed, his words were so touching that, soldier as I am, I wept, your highness—I really wept."

"Excellent man," mutters Mademoiselle, stretching out her hand towards him. "I shall not forget this evidence of your appreciation of so noble a gentleman."

D'Artagnan makes a profound obeisance.

("My promotion is now assured," he says to himself, "as well as poor Lauzun's pardon. Mademoiselle has great interest with his Majesty.")

D'Artagnan passes his hand across his eyes, as if to brush away tears, which he does not shed.

"I have seen much since I served his Majesty,"—he continues in broken sentences, simulating deep grief. "I am an observer of human nature;—but never—never did I know a man of such elevation of mind, with feelings so warm, so genuine, as Monsieur de Lauzun. The charms of his person, the dignity of his manners, his fortitude and patience in adversity, are more honourable to him than the splendour of his position as the first nobleman in France."

Mademoiselle, unable to contain her feelings, lays her hand upon d'Artagnan's hand, and presses it.

"Your penetration does you honour, Monsieur d'Artagnan. Yet so mean, so base is the envy of a Court, that it is whispered about, loud enough even for me in my exalted position to hear, that Lauzun cares only for my revenues—not for myself."

"Good God, what a slander!" cried d'Artagnan, with a face of well-simulated horror.

"Yes; but I do not believe it," hastily adds Mademoiselle.

"I can pledge my honour as a soldier, your highness, it is a lie," breaks in d'Artagnan, anxious for his friend's prospects.

"I know it—I know it," answers Mademoiselle with triumph.

"Ah, madame," continues d'Artagnan, shaking with suppressed laughter, "did I not fear to offend your delicacy, I could say more."

"Ah! did Lauzun speak often of me?" she asks, and a fire comes into her sunken eyes. "Tell me."

"He spoke of nothing else. Day and night your name was on his lips. My honour as a Gascon upon it."

"Repeat this to me," cries Mademoiselle with ecstasy.

"You little know, your highness, what tortures he suffers at being separated from you."

"Alas! Monsieur d'Artagnan, he cannot suffer more than I!" and Mademoiselle's sigh is almost a groan.

"Your highness has great influence over his Majesty. Is it possible that his imprisonment may be shortened?"

"Can you doubt that my whole life, my influence, my wealth, all I have, will be devoted to this object?" exclaims Mademoiselle.

("Good," thinks d'Artagnan; "I have served my poor friend, and I hope myself, well. What an imbecile she is!")

At this moment there is a general move. The Queen, who has been playing cards, rises, and Mademoiselle is forced to accompany her.

Years pass; and Lauzun still remains a prisoner at Pignerol.

Mademoiselle is at the Luxembourg. She is sitting in her closet writing, when a page enters, and announces Madame de Maintenon. This lady is now the recognised governess of the legitimatised children of the King, the bosom friend of their

mother, the Marquise de Montespan. Already she is scheming to supplant her in the King's affections. Madame de Maintenon is singularly handsome. Her face is pale; her complexion marble-like; her eyes are large and lustrous, though somewhat fixed and stern. Her glossy, dark hair is raised high on her head, and a mantilla of lace is thrown over it. Her dress is of a sombre colour, but of the richest material. It rustles along the ground, as, with measured steps, she advances towards Mademoiselle. The latter is conscious of the stately bearing of the governess, who dares not, however, presume first to address her. Mademoiselle does not rise, but bends her head in acknowledgment of her salutation, and signs to Madame de Maintenon to be seated.

"You are come alone, madame," says the Princess. "I should have rejoiced to see your little charges—those dear children of whom I am so fond. Are they well?"

"I am happy to inform your highness they are in perfect health. The Duc de Maine looked lovely this morning when he went with me to mass in the royal chapel. I have come to bring you a little letter he has written to your highness," and the Marquise presents a note addressed in a schoolboy's hand. "Ever since he has corresponded with you,

during his stay in Holland and at Barège, he finds such pleasure in writing to you, I do not like to forbid it."

"The dear child! I love him greatly," replies Mademoiselle, secretly wondering on what errand Madame de Maintenon has come.

"I have the honour to inform your royal highness," says the Marquise after a pause, fixing her black eyes keenly upon her, "my visit to you is official. I come from the King."

Mademoiselle falls back in her chair; a mist gathers before her eyes. "It must be about Lauzun she has come!" is her first thought.

"But before I proceed to the subject of my mission," continues Madame de Maintenon, speaking in a clear metallic voice, and all the while contemplating Mademoiselle as if she were an object of minute study—"but before I proceed, allow me to offer to your highness the compliments of Madame de Montespan, who is hunting at Clugny with the King. She bids me pray you to think of everything to please his Majesty, in order that he may be inclined to grant what you have so much at heart."

Mademoiselle colours, and presses her hand to her heart, so violently does it throb.

"Madame de Montespan," continues the Marquise, "has the highest admiration for the constancy and the fortitude you have shown on a certain subject, madame. May I add my tribute of sympathy also?"

Mademoiselle smiles, and bows graciously. She is not ignorant of the growing power of the governess, and her high favour with the King.

"We who live at Court," adds the Marquise loftily, "know too well how often great princes forget those whom they once loved. Your highness is an illustrious exception. May I, madame, be permitted to address you on this delicate subject? It is the purpose of my visit."

"I entreat you to speak," cries Mademoiselle, greatly excited. "Tell me at once. I cannot bear suspense. Is his Majesty about to liberate Monsieur de Lauzun after so many years of imprisonment?"

"Well," replies Madame de Maintenon, with an air of immense importance, "you shall judge, Princess. His Majesty thinks that it is possible, under certain conditions——"

"Will he acknowledge Lauzun as my husband?"

"He will never sanction the marriage, your highness," answers the Marquise decidedly, avoiding Mademoiselle's eager gaze.

Here is a blow! Mademoiselle is absolutely stunned. Madame de Maintenon proceeds in the same monotonous tone:—

"His Majesty has considered the possibility of liberating Monsieur de Lauzun, but there are difficulties, not perhaps insurmountable, but which at present render his gracious intention impossible."

"Name them," cries Mademoiselle almost fiercely, suddenly sitting upright in her chair—"name them instantly." She has turned ashy pale; her hands, which she extends towards the other lady in her agitation, tremble. She is a pitiable object.

"Why, the fact is," and the wily governess hems once or twice, gives a slight cough, then clears her voice, "his Majesty does not choose that the principality of Dombes and the Château and estates of Eu, with which he is informed you have invested Monsieur de Lauzun, should go out of the royal family. This is the difficulty which at present weighs with the King. Madame de Montespan uses all her eloquence in your favour, madame."

"I am obliged to her," answers Mademoiselle drily. "It was rumoured that she was the person who caused his Majesty to withdraw his consent to my marriage."

This is dangerous ground, and Madame de Main-

tenon hastens to change the subject; for she well knows how true are Mademoiselle's suspicions.

"I have nothing to do with the King's reasons," is her cautious rejoinder. "Doubtless they are excellent." Then she glances towards the door as if about to go. "Even with your royal highness I must be excused canvassing what these reasons are. I came simply to deliver a message with which I was entrusted, and to carry back to his Majesty your answer."

This speech, delivered with the most freezing coldness, almost frightens Mademoiselle into a fit. She is quite unable to argue with Madame de Maintenon, greatly her superior in intellect and in craft, specially now, when her excited feelings barely permit her to understand what is passing. She has sense, however, to make a sign to the Marquise, intimating her pleasure that she should not depart, which she is preparing to do.

"His Majesty observed," continues that lady, looking steadfastly out of the window, "that it seems strange these royal appanages should pass away into an undistinguished family, while those who are near and most dear to his Majesty are at this time absolutely portionless — the Duc de Maine, for instance."

"What!" exclaims Mademoiselle, "is it only by enriching the Duc de Maine that the Comte de Lauzun can be liberated?" As she puts this question her eyes flash, and her brow darkens. Then, seeing the stony gaze of the imperturbable Marquise fixed upon her, she composes herself, and awaits her reply with more calmness.

"I must again entreat your highness to remember," answers Madame de Maintenon, rising from her chair, and dropping her eyes on the ground with affected humility, "that I am here only as an ambassadress. I beg your highness to excuse aught I may have said to offend you. But, as I perceived a way of accommodation open, I ventured to approach you as a mediator—simply as a mediator." These last words are spoken with a kind of unctuous hypocrisy peculiar to herself. "Now, madame, if you permit, I will take my leave. My duties call me back to my beloved charges. I have been absent too long already."

Forthwith, every device was used to force Mademoiselle into compliance. The little Duc de Maine was represented as being fonder of her than of any other creature breathing—one of those singular attachments, in fact, that are sometimes observed in children, and are quite unaccountable. To favour

this assertion, the worthy pupil of Madame de Maintenon was educated in a system of deceit. Every morning he addressed a little billet-doux to Mademoiselle, represented as the genuine effusion of a young and innocent heart, the same billet-doux having been indited by his governess overnight and copied by himself. Bouquets, presents, kisses, and caresses were lavished in the same manner. The child played his part so well that Mademoiselle actually believed at last in this simulated attachment. Madame de Montespan failed not, also, to pay the utmost court to Mademoiselle, and represented to her how earnestly she used her influence in order to induce the King to liberate Lauzun. After these manœuvres had been continued for some time, and the two *intrigantes* deemed that the mind of Mademoiselle was sufficiently prepared, Madame de Maintenon again set forth to pay her another visit at the Luxembourg Palace.

This time she at once announced that the King had determined to liberate Lauzun. Mademoiselle, in transports of joy at the intelligence, so far forgot her dignity as to embrace the cunning messenger, and to load her with thanks.

After this ebullition had a little subsided, Madame de Maintenon gravely begged Mademoi-

selle not to thank *her*. She again acted merely as an ambassadress, she said. "But," she adds, "there is one person who does deserve her thanks; for nothing can exceed the earnestness with which he has urged her highness's petition. Nay, he has not feared to encounter the King's anger, so constant, so energetic have been his prayers. It is to him her gratitude is due."

"Who can have been this friend—this benefactor?" cried the Princess. "Tell me, I implore you, that I may load him with my gratitude."

"I can quite understand your feelings," returned Madame de Maintenon; "your wish to be informed of the name of this unknown benefactor is most natural; but to gratify you, I must break a promise—a most solemn promise—I have made *never* to reveal his name. He did not desire to be known; he wished to serve you in secret."

"Don't talk to me of secrecy, madame, in such a moment. Tell me at once to whom I am so deeply indebted."

"If I must speak," replied the inimitable De Maintenon (rejoicing at the success of her manœuvres), "it is the *Duc de Maine*, who prevailed on his father to grant the petition he knew would

so delight his beloved friend and protectress. The affection he feels towards you is indeed something——"

"The darling child!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, "how I love him! Is it possible he has done this for me! How can I reward him?—what can I do to show him how grateful I am?"

This was precisely the point to which Madame de Maintenon had been labouring to bring the Princess. She now artfully observed that there was only one way of rewarding the *disinterested* attachment of the Duc de Maine in a manner worthy of Mademoiselle. I feel bound, however," she continued, "to warn your highness that, after all that has been said, and the personal interest his Majesty feels in the success of these negotiations, he will be so incensed at any withdrawal on your part now, that your personal liberty—yes, madame," she repeated, seeing the Princess's look of terror, "your personal liberty will be in danger. You may be sent to the Bastille!"

The mention of such a possibility alarmed Mademoiselle beyond measure, and she anxiously inquired of Madame de Maintenon if she thought there was any chance of such a misfortune?

"Not if by your generosity you bind his Majesty,

as it were, to fulfil the pledge he has now given," was the discreet reply.

Thus did Madame de Maintenon unfold her tactics, and work on the weak mind of the love-sick Princess. She saw that the point was already gained, and, fearing to destroy the favourable impression she had made, left Mademoiselle to ruminate on the approaching return of Lauzun, and all the happiness in store for her. Hastening back to Versailles, she communicated her success to the King and to Madame de Montespan, who were equally delighted at the triumph of their unworthy artifices.

CHAPTER LXVI.

CONNUBIAL BLISS.

The Duc de Maine was invested with the principality of Dombes and the county of Eu. The deeds were signed in Madame de Montespan's apartments at Versailles.

The sacrifice once made nothing could exceed the ecstasy of Mademoiselle. After a separation of many years, Lauzun would be restored to her arms! He was free—he would be with her in a few days! The exquisite certainty of bliss intoxicated her senses.

On her return to the Luxembourg she flew to her room, and took a hand mirror from her toilette. She gazed at herself in it attentively; she asked herself, as she has already done a hundred times before, "Can he still love me? Are my eyes bright? Are my cheeks rosy? Is my hair abundant as in the old days when Lauzun praised it?"

The examination satisfied her. Joy had effaced the wrinkles, and brought a passing bloom back to her face. She overlooked her grey locks, those she could powder. Her lips parted into a smile. While she was still looking at herself, and turning her head in various positions in order to catch the light, a page entered, and announced, "Monsieur de Baraille" (he was a friend of Lauzun). Baraille's sudden entrance startled her. She turned round abruptly, stumbled against a chair, and the mirror, an oval of rock crystal set in a gold frame, dropped from her hand.

"Ah! Monsieur de Baraille," she cried, looking at the fragments which strewed the floor, "why did you come in so suddenly? This is a dreadful omen."

* * * * * *

Mademoiselle de Montpensier is at Choisy. The agitation of her mind is indescribable. She has the gravest reasons for displeasure. Lauzun is in France, but shows no desire to see her.

At last he makes his appearance. He is dressed in an old uniform, which he had worn before his imprisonment; it was now too short, and too small for him, and shabby and torn. His hair, of a reddish shade, has fallen off during his long im-

prisonment, and he wears a black wig with flowing curls, which covers his shoulders. He enters her cabinet, by the gallery, hung with the portraits of her ancestors. At sight of him Mademoiselle springs to her feet, and opens her arms to embrace him. Lauzun throws himself on the ground before her. She raises him, covers him with kisses, murmuring words of fond endearment into his ear.

For a few moments each, overcome by widely different feelings, remains speechless. Lauzun examines her curiously. This inspection does not seem satisfactory. He knits his brow, and slightly shrugs his shoulders. Altogether his manner is far from reassuring. He does not care to conceal his surprise at the change he sees in the royal lady beside him. She is now sixty, her face is pinched and lined by age; her form bent and attenuated. She has put powder on her grey hair, which is decked with ribbons, and rouge upon her shrivelled cheeks, in a vain effort to appear young. But even her blind infatuation can no longer deceive her. She is old and she knows it.

"I must ask your pardon," says Lauzun at last, breaking an awkward pause, "for having been so long on the road to Paris to join you. My health is very delicate, it is weakened by long confine-

ment. I was ill at Amboise." (The truth being that he had been engaged in a violent flirtation with the wife of the governor, the Marquise d'Alluye. Mademoiselle had been informed of this.)

As Lauzun speaks, Mademoiselle raises her eyes, and looks him in the face. It was the same deep harmonious voice, full of subtle melody, that had once charmed her ear, like a cadence of sweet music. There were the same clear eyes, whose glance ruled her destiny. Those eyes that had haunted her day and night for so many years, through the mists of time and absence. There were the features whose every turn she had studied with unutterable tenderness; those lips which had parted to utter words on which hung her very life. There before her was her Lauzun,—the object of such longing desire, such tortured suspense; of such eager strivings, of such willing self-sacrifice. But oh, how changed!

Now the scales had fallen from her eyes. For the first time she saw him as he was. He was her Lauzun no longer. She felt that she was repugnant to him. An agony of grief welled up within her; she could have screamed for very bitterness of soul in the wild impulse of her despair. But

at this supreme moment her pride came to her support. Should she let him mock the strivings of her tortured spirit? gauge the abyss of her misery with his cold steely eye? No; mortal as were the wounds his cruelty had inflicted, they should still be sacred. She would say nothing. As she looks at him (and, looking at him, gazes also through the long vista of years that his presence recalls) she composes her countenance to an unnatural calmness, and she replies to him, in a voice almost as careless as his own—

"It gives me infinite pain to hear you have been ill, but I rejoice to see you so perfectly restored. I never saw you looking better in my life."

A glare of anger passed into Lauzun's eyes, and he frowned. Again there was a long and awkward pause.

"You have laid out a great deal of money here at Choisy," he says with a sneer, his eyes wandering round. "I think you have been ill-advised to purchase this place. It is a mere *guinguette*, lying in a hole. What a useless building it is—so ill designed too!" and he casts his eyes contemptuously down the suite of rooms, the doors of which are open.

"Some people think it is not good enough for

me," answers Mademoiselle with forced calmness, although her lips tremble in spite of herself.

"Have you paid for it, madame?" asks Lauzun with the utmost impertinence.

"I have paid for it," replies the Princess.

Lauzun now rises, and strides up and down the cabinet. He strolls into the adjoining gallery, eyeing the precious ornaments with which the tables are covered. He takes the most valuable articles in his hands and carefully examines them, holding them up against the light. Then he returns, stands opposite Mademoiselle, and examines her features with a stare of cynical scrutiny. She grows crimson under this insolent inspection, but says nothing.

"You would have done much better to have given me the money you have squandered here. I have suffered great misery."

"I have given you too much already, Monsieur de Lauzun," replies Mademoiselle in an unsteady voice, for his heartless greed smote her to the very soul.

"I fear you are horribly cheated," adds Lauzun, not noticing her reply, and again he walks up and down the room. "I could manage matters much better for you. Will you make me your treasurer?"

He speaks eagerly, and there is a hungry gleam in his eye that bodes ill for Mademoiselle's revenues.

"No, I will not," answers Mademoiselle firmly. "If you want to know, I have paid for this place forty thousand livres. I sold my string of pearls to purchase it."

"Oh! you have sold your string of pearls without consulting me?" interrupts Lauzun with an offended air. "What waste! What folly!"

He stops in his pacing up and down the room, and fixes his eyes upon her in another silent scrutiny.

"I see you still wear coloured ribbons in your hair. Surely, at your age, this is ridiculous."

"The Queen does the same."

"Are you not older than the Queen?"

"I am old, Monsieur de Lauzun," replies Mademoiselle, stung to the quick, yet speaking with dignity; "but persons of my rank dress according to established etiquette. Have you nothing more to say to me, Lauzun?" she says, speaking low.

She can bear no more; her pride and her fortitude are rapidly forsaking her. She feels she is breaking down, spite of herself. She longs inex-

pressibly to fold Lauzun in her arms, to tell him all her love; to beseech him to return it, even ever so little a return, for that vast treasure she offers. But she is withheld by absolute shame.

"I have made great sacrifices to restore you to liberty, Lauzun," she continues timidly, her voice almost failing her, and not daring to look up at him for fear of encountering his chilling gaze. "I have made many sacrifices. I understood that you approved of them." Lauzun does not answer. Mademoiselle speaks humbly now, for what is money, contempt, insult to her, so that he would love her, only a little? "I have also made arrangements with Colbert to pay your debts."

"I am obliged to you," replies Lauzun, with a sneer. "Let me tell you, however," and he advances close to where she is sitting and fixes his eyes fiercely upon her—"Let me tell you I would rather command the Royal Dragoons and be back again at Court in attendance on the King, than have all the money you have, or ever can give me."

Mademoiselle turns very faint, and clasps her hands. Her eyes close, as if she is going to swoon. Lauzun contemplates her unmoved. He does not offer her the smallest assistance.

"Good God!" she exclaims after a while, "how

much I am to be pitied! I have despoiled myself and you are ungrateful."

"Louise," says Lauzun, feeling he has gone too far, stooping and trying to kiss her hand, "spare me hysterics. Let us talk business."

"We have talked nothing else," cries Mademoiselle, her indignation rising at his heartless indifference. "Not a word of affection has come from your lips," her voice grows thick and tears rush into her eyes. Spite of herself, she is again rapidly giving way. It was the old fight between heart and no heart, man who feels nothing, woman who feels everything.

"I want my place at Court," says Lauzun abruptly. "Will you use your influence to reinstate me? Else, I would rather have remained in prison at Pignerol." He speaks in a tone of the bitterest reproach.

"I will do what I can," Mademoiselle answers in a husky voice.

"Do what you can!" retorts Lauzun, turning upon her savagely, "do what you can! *Morbleu*, if you answer me like that, I will tell you the truth. You have ruined me—you have destroyed my reputation—lost me my position. Louise d'Orléans, I wish I had never seen you!"

"It is false," returns Mademoiselle in a loud voice, her passion rising at his injustice; "it is false. I have not injured you—the King will tell you so himself." Lauzun is growing more and more defiant, almost threatening. His hand rests on the hilt of his sword. This is too much even for her to bear. "If you have nothing more to say, Monsieur de Lauzun, leave me." She speaks with the habit of command long years have give her.

"I will not go," cries he; "you have no right to order me. *Am I not your husband?*" Lauzun hisses out these last words, more like a venomous serpent than a man. He grasps the arm of Mademoiselle, who shrinks away from him. His whole bearing is wild and menacing. "You leave me without money, you who have lost me all I value in the world; you, who are old enough to be my mother!" Mademoiselle covers her face with her hands, she cowers before him. "Can you deny it? Instead of providing me with a proper residence and equipage when I came out of prison, I have not even a carriage of my own. I am in miserable lodgings with Rollinde, one of your people, while *you*—you live in a palace. I have no money to pay my debts."

"It is false," she replies, rising and facing him

boldly. "I *have* paid your debts. If you have fresh ones they are gambling debts. Those I refuse to pay."

"But you shall!" roars Lauzun, stamping his foot and raising his hand as if to strike her. "I am your husband. I have a right to all you have."

"I will pay no more," shrieks Mademoiselle, now excited beyond fear. "Go to your friends, those ladies you love so well, Madame de Montespan and the others." She clenches her fist as the bitter pangs of jealousy shoot through her soul. "I will not pay such debts," she repeats; then she draws herself up, and faces him with a courage he has never seen in her before. It calms him instantly.

"Look at these diamond buttons you sent me. They are vile. You have such splendid jewels!" He lifts up his lace ruffles and displays a pair of solitaire diamonds of great beauty, which fasten his wristbands. He is as fawning and eager as a beggar.

"I will give you other diamonds," answers Mademoiselle with composure. "But what I do for you in future depends on your own conduct, Monsieur de Lauzun, or rather Duc de Montpensier, for such I have created you."

There was a depth of irony in thus addressing him by his title at this particular moment.

"Well, madame, as you please," answers Lauzun, comtemptuously scanning her all over. "If I am not satisfied I shall go abroad and command foreign armies. I will go *anywhere* to rid myself of you. I hope never to see you again," and a look of undisguised hatred flashes from his eyes.

"You need not go far to rid yourself of me," cries Mademoiselle, incensed beyond bounds. "Leave me instantly, ungrateful man! You have sufficiently outraged me. In the presence too of my great ancestors," she adds, and with a stately action she extends her hand towards the portraits which hang around; "those ancestors, one of whose time-honoured titles I have given you. You might, I think, have chosen a more suitable spot for your insults," and she measures him from head to foot. Then with an imperious gesture she points to the door.

Still they met, Mademoiselle yet clung to Lauzun. In the month of September they are together at Choisy for a few days. Lauzun has enormous gambling debts and wants money, therefore he is come. On returning one evening from hunting he sees Mademoiselle seated under the shade of one

of the fine old elms in the park, her favourite tree. She is in tears. It is nine o'clock at night, she has long awaited his return; now it is nearly dark. Lauzun gallops up to where she sits. He dismounts, gives his horse into the hands of a servant, and casts himself on the grass beside her. By so doing he splashes her dress with mud, but he offers no apology. He unfastens the heavy hunting boots he wears, and endeavours to draw them off, but he does not succeed. Then he turns suddenly round and thrusts them into her face.

"Here, Louise d'Orléans," he says, "make yourself useful; take off my boots." Mademoiselle betrays no emotion, she only rises and returns to the house.

They never met again. A brief record remained of her existence, graven on the tomb, where she lay, among "the daughters of France," unloved—unmourned; a sad example, that riches to a woman are too often a curse. The brief record is as follows:—

"Anne Marie Louise d'Orléans, eldest daughter of Gaston de France; Souveraine Princesse de Dombes, Princesse Dauphine d'Auvergne, Comtesse d'Eu, Duchesse de Montpensier; died 1693, aged sixty-six."

CHAPTER LXVII.

FALL OF DE MONTESPAN.

About this time Madame de Maintenon announced to the King that she had received a mission from heaven to convert him from the error of his ways. "I was brought to Court miraculously for this purpose; God willed it," she writes to her daughter. Singularly enough, this conviction of her mission coincided with the absence of Madame de Montespan at the baths of Bourbon.

Louis had come to view these temporary absences as a relief. He had grown somewhat weary of the once-adored Marquise. He inclined to think the society of Madame de Maintenon preferable. In her company the charms of friendship exceeded the delights of love. She was leading him up to heaven on an easy path strewn with flowers. Conscious as he was of his past sins, he yet liked the process of repentance.

The apartments of Madame de Maintenon at

Versailles, on the same floor as his own, were well placed for constant intercourse. They no longer exist, but the situation is identified as having been near the south wing, contiguous to his own suite, which was separated from that of the Queen by the Salle de l'Œil de Bœuf, a corridor, and some smaller rooms.

The affection of her pupil, the Duc de Maine, and the esteem and approval of the Queen, strengthened Madame de Maintenon's position. Maria Theresa quite venerated the *ci-devant* Veuve Scarron.

Maria Theresa, who refused to doubt La Vallière's purity, and who long defended the virtue of Madame de Montespan, was born to be a dupe. Her unsuspicious nature fell an easy prey to the duplicity of Madame de Maintenon, who would have imposed on a stronger-minded person than the guileless Queen. The King carefully intensified these good impressions. He confided to his consort the conviction of Madame de Maintenon that he would infallibly be "damned" if he did not cleave to herself alone, and live with her in love and unity. Such words from the lips of her august husband, whom she had all her life worshipped too entirely to have dared to appropriate to herself, won the

Queen's whole heart. Never had she been so blessed. Her Olympian spouse spent hours beside her; his conduct was exemplary. Maria Theresa, overcome by the weight of her obligations to the wily *gouvernante*, treated her with the utmost distinction. She joined with the King in appointing her lady in waiting to the new Dauphine.

By-and-by Madame de Montespan, having finished her course of drinking and bathing at Bourbon, returned. That the waters had agreed with her was evident. Her eyes were more voluptuous, her aspect more enticing than ever. For a time the King's conviction of Madame de Maintenon's mission wavered; he forgot his salvation.

Madame de Maintenon, invested with the authority of a Christian prophetess, denounced his apostacy. Madame de Montespan was furious; quarrels ensued between herself and Madame de Maintenon, in which the choleric, frank-spoken sinner was overruled by the crafty saint. The King, called in as umpire, decided always in favour of the latter; she could clothe her wrongs in such eloquent language, she was so specious, so plausible, she continued to identify herself so entirely with his salvation, that he again became repentant. His

coldness towards her rival increased. This rival, the governess of her children, insulted Madame la Marquise de Montespan. Her fury knew no bounds. She felt that her fall was approaching; that the ground on which she stood was undermined. She denounced her treacherous governess to the King; she declared that the Veuve Scarron had not been immaculate. She even caused a pamphlet to be printed in which names, places, dates, and details were given. She showed it to the King; Louis shook his head, and replied that she had herself defended her protégée so ably that he was unalterably convinced of her virtue. The Marquise de Montespan was bowed out of Versailles.

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The influence of Madame de Maintenon changed the atmosphere of the Court. A holy calm succeeded to strife and agitation. Gallantry, gambling, intrigues, and women no longer formed the staple of general conversation. Religious discussions, theological disputes, and ecclesiastical gossip became the fashion. Anecdotes of the various Court confessors were discussed in the Œil de Bœuf with extraordinary eagerness. The priest of Versailles was a more important personage than a

royal duke; Bossuet had more influence than Louvois; Père la Chaise overtopped the great Louis himself. The Court ladies became decided prudes, rolled their eyes sanctimoniously, wore lace kerchiefs, renounced rouge, and rarely smiled. No whisper of scandal profaned the royal circle. His Majesty was subdued and serene, assiduous in the affairs of religion, and constant in his attendance on his comely directress.

On the 30th July, 1683, the Queen died. She expired in the arms of Madame de Maintenon. On her death-bed she gave her the nuptual ring which she had received from his Majesty. This gift was significant.

The concealed ambition of Madame de Maintenon, her greed of dominion, the insolence of the inferior about to revenge the wrongs suffered in her obscurity, a sense, too, of her own power, now roused her to grasp that exalted position which, even while the Queen lived, had tempted her imagination. Now began a system of coquetry, so refined, as to claim the distinction of a fine art. The lady is forty-five, and looks young and fresh for her age; her hair is still black and glossy; her forehead smooth, her skin exquisitely white; her figure lissom and upright, if ample. There is a hidden

fire in her stealthy eyes; a grandeur in her bearing, that charms while it imposes. Not all the vicissitudes of her chequered career can wash out the blood of the d'Aubignés which flows in her veins. The old King is desperately in love with her. It is the first time in his life he has encountered any opposition to his will. There is a novelty in the sensation wonderfully enthralling. The conquest of a lady who can thus balk him acquires an enormous importance in his eyes. He has run the fortune of war both at home and abroad; he has carried fortresses by storm, assailed the walls of great cities; he has conquered in the open plain; but here is a female citadel that is impregnable. His attack and her defence are conducted in daily interviews, lasting six, and even ten hours. If he can win her, he feels too that his salvation is insured. A life of repentance passed with such an angel, is a foretaste of celestial bliss. There is something sublime in the woman who can reconcile earth with heaven, and satisfy his longings in time and eternity.

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Suddenly Madame de Maintenon announces her intention of leaving the Court for ever.

The King, who occupies his usual place in her

saloon, sitting in an arm-chair placed between the door leading into the ante-chamber and the chimney-piece, listens with speechless dismay.

Madame de Maintenon, who sits opposite to him, on the other side of the chimney-piece, in a recess hung with red damask, a little table before her, stitches calmly at the tapestry she holds in her hand. She affects not to observe him, and continues speaking in a full firm voice. "My mission is accomplished, Sire. I have been permitted to be the humble instrument of leading your Majesty to higher and holier thoughts. Your peace with heaven is now made. I desire to retire, leaving my glorious work complete."

"What, madame! Do I hear aright? You propose to leave me?—me, a solitary man, to whom your society is indispensable?" There is a deep longing in the King's eye as it rests upon her, a tremulous solicitude in his manner that she observes with secret joy.

"Sire, I implore you to allow me to depart. I yearn for repose. I have remained at Court greatly against my will, solely for your advantage."

"Remain always," murmurs the King, contemplating her fondly; "my life—my happiness—my very being is bound up in you. Deprived of

you, I may again fall into deadly sin. Do not forsake me."

These last words are spoken in a whisper, full of tenderness. He rises from his arm-chair and approaches her. Madame de Maintenon looks at him sharply; then moves her chair backwards. Louis stops midway and gazes at her timidly. He returns to his arm-chair, and sighs profoundly.

"Impossible, your Majesty," replies the Marquise stiffly, arranging the folds of her dress. "I repeat, my task is done. The Court is reformed, your salvation secure. But, while benefiting others, I have exposed myself to calumny. Sire, I am called your mistress. I am branded as the successor of Madame de Montespan."

"What villain has dared to assail your immaculate virtue? Tell me who he is, and there is no punishment he shall not suffer," and the King's face flashes scarlet. There is the old look of command upon his brow—the old decision in his manner.

"Sire," answers Madame de Maintenon quietly, "such passion is unnecessary. I am not worthy of it. I have already done all that is needful, let me go. I can serve you no longer."

"You are worthy, madame, of all that a man—

that a monarch can lay at your feet," cries Louis with enthusiasm. A cynical smile plays upon her full-lipped mouth while the King speaks.

"I am at least worthy of respect, Sire. The suspicion of impurity is intolerable. I cannot bear it; I must go."

"You are too hurried, dearest madame," returns the King; "too impressionable. Whatever observations may be aroused by our intimacy, and my well-known attachment to you, they should not annoy you. Your character is an all-sufficient defence."

"Ah, Sire, this is not sufficient. I must fly from even the semblance of suspicion. You are a single man, I am a widow. I must leave Versailles. Your Majesty cannot wish me to remain, to become an object of contempt."

"Contempt? Impossible!" exclaims Louis abruptly. "No one whom I, the King of France, have loved, has ever suffered contempt."

No sooner were these words out of his mouth, than the King had reason to repent having uttered them. The outraged prude burst into a flood of tears. After all, was her crafty scheming to be in vain? Would Louis not understand that as a wife—and a wife only—she would remain?

"Ah, Sire," sobs she, with genuine sorrow, "is this the return you make for my too great devotion to your Majesty's salvation? I, who have led you step by step towards that Deity, whose wrath your transgressions had so justly incensed? Is it for this I have rescued you from the flames of Purgatory—the fire of everlasting Hell?"

Louis turns ghastly pale; a nervous tremor seizes him. He dare not look Madame de Maintenon in the face, for her piercing black eyes glare upon him, and seem to scan his inmost soul. He dare not interrupt her; he must listen to all she has to say, so great is her empire over him.

She continues:—

"Am I sunk so low in your esteem that you mention me in the same breath with a Montespan, a Fontanges? Alas, I have soiled my good name to serve you, and is *this* then my recompense?"

As she speaks, in a hard resolute voice, her reproachful eyes rivet themselves upon Louis.

"Do you forget, Sire, that I am the woman whom your sainted Queen specially esteemed? On whose bosom she expired? To whom, as she drew her dying breath, she gave this ring?"

She takes from her finger the nuptual ring which Maria Theresa had given her. It was a single

diamond of remarkable brilliancy. After contemplating it for an instant she drops it on the floor, midway between herself and Louis, then, with a stately gesture, she rises to depart.

The impress of many passions is visible on the countenance of the aged monarch. Love and pride are written there. Pride is on his broad forehead—in the carriage of his head—in his arched and bushy eyebrows—in his still erect form—in the action of his hands and arms, as they grasp the chair on which he sits upright. Pride, intense, inflexible pride. But his dark eyes glow with passion. Those eyes devour Madame de Maintenon, as she stands erect before him, her eyes turned towards heaven, the ring at her feet. His mouth, around which deep wrinkles gather, works — as did his father's—with a nervous spasm; but the parted lips seem to pant for the beloved object before him. At length he raises himself slowly from his chair—stoops—picks up the nuptual ring of his first wife—kisses it, and places it on the finger of Madame de Maintenon.

"*Mon amie*," he says, with solemnity, "do not leave me. As your husband I will defend you."

Even in the reign of Louis XIV. public opinion

made itself heard. Placards appeared upon the walls of Paris to this effect:—

"Lost—The Royal Sceptre. The finder will be well rewarded."

The next day was announced, in the same place:—

"The Sceptre found—Discovered on the toilette of a hypocrite.

"The Scales of Justice, also lost, found hidden in the sleeve of a Jesuit."

Other placards followed; they ran as follows:—

GRAND SPECTACLE!

His Majesty . . . . Marionettes.

In the Chapel of Versailles.

Gratis!

On a day to be hereafter announced.

Louis XIV. will fill the part of Gargantua; Madame de Maintenon, Madame Gigogne; the Abbé Gobelin, Pierrot; Père la Chaise, Satan (the lover of Madame Gigogne.)

CHAPTER LXVIII.

QUEEN MAINTENON.

It is the winter of 1685. The night is dark and starless. Fast falling snow makes the air thick and covers the ground as with a white mantle. An icy blast is blowing, chilling alike to man and beast. As eleven o'clock strikes, the Archbishop of Paris leaves his palace, spite of the inclement weather. He is alone in his coach. Midnight is past when he draws up outside the great gates of Versailles. These open silently. He drives onward, traversing the vast courtyard, passing the equestrian statue of Louis XIV., until he reaches the Cour de Marbre, between the two pavilions of the central portion of the château. Here the outer portal at the foot of the grand staircase is ajar. Bontemps, Governor of the Palace of Versailles, valet, confidant, and purveyor generally to the wants of his Majesty, stands behind it awaiting the Archbishop. He holds a light, which he carefully shades with his hand.

Monseigneur de Harlay, Archbishop, descends from his coach shivering all over. His teeth chatter in his head, not only from the cold which is excessive, but from apprehension of what he is about to engage in. Bontemps precedes him up the stairs, holding the light in his hand. They traverse whole suites of rooms, a spacious hall, a long gallery, and many corridors. No word is spoken, every soul is asleep, and it is urgent they should remain so. Once within the King's apartments all is light, warmth, and luxury. The well-nigh frozen dignitary revives. Before him is the King, dignified, composed, and cheerful. With him are the Marquis de Montchevreuil and the Chevalier de Forbin, as witnesses; Père la Chaise is also there to assist the Archbishop. An altar is dressed in the centre of the room. As soon as his Majesty has saluted Monseigneur de Harlay, Bontemps is dispatched to fetch Madame de Maintenon. She loses no time in appearing. The marriage rites are performed by Père la Chaise, confessor to the King; the benediction is given by the Archbishop.

The marriage is to be secret; but Louis XIV. henceforth addresses her as "*Madame.*" He receives his ministers in her saloon; the Marquise de Maintenon the while sitting upon a fauteuil in

his presence. These are royal honours. Monseigneur le Dauphin and the princes of the blood never forgive the marriage. The contempt and hatred they feel towards Madame de Maintenon cannot be concealed. As favourite they had tolerated her; as wife they rebel against her. Yet her will is law. The Duc de Maine and the Duc and Duchesse de Bourgogne, son and daughter-in-law to Monseigneur, are the only exceptions.

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We are again at Choisy. Every window is a blaze of light, the terraced garden flashes with millions of coloured lamps. The Dauphin and his consort, the princes and princesses, courtiers, singers, actors, and poets, fill the foreground. Brocade and satin sweep the terraces; cocked hats and feathers, ribbons, lace, plumes, jewels, orders, wave and glitter. There is the sound of laughter and mad jest — joyous music and voluptuous feasting, *petit soupers* and splendid balls, theatricals and concerts.

Long flights of marble stairs descend through bosky groves, sweet with the scent of lilac and honeysuckles, to the Seine, on whose grassy banks, illuminated by torches and bonfires, a flotilla of boats are moored under the overhanging woods.

If the essence of all the fêtes given in France was concentrated, the result would be Choisy before the Revolution. In the hands of Monseigneur it is a miniature court, rivalling what Versailles was; a court where youth, joy and beauty reign supreme. Louis, now old, desires that all the world should be old likewise—fast, pray, confess and hear sermons like himself. Choisy is a scandal to him. The Dauphin receives orders to quit, and take up his abode at Meudon. Monseigneur, a short, stout, thick-set man, with a fair complexion, and what would have been handsome features had his nose not been broken, appears before Madame de Maintenon, the real ruler of France. She is seated in her apartments, working as usual at her tapestry. She does not rise at his entrance, and her aspect is severe and repellant.

"Madame," says the Dauphin, seating himself at a gesture she makes, "can you explain to me what motive has induced his Majesty to banish me from my favourite residence of Choisy?"

Madame de Maintenon does not raise her eyes from her work. "Banishment you call it, Monseigneur; you mistake the term. Not banishment, simply a change of abode designed for your good, by his Majesty your august father."

"For my good? Surely I am of an age to judge for myself! If I cannot live where I please, I am under arrest. I am not aware in what I have merited the royal displeasure."

"Observe, Monseigneur le Dauphin," answers the Marquise, fixing her black eyes upon him, "the King feels no displeasure; on the contrary, he desires your more constant presence at his Court, near his person." The Marquise spoke these words with special emphasis.

"Madame, I am most grateful for the amiable manner in which you express his Majesty's flattering wish, but might not some plan be found to unite my presence at Court with my residence at Choisy?"

"Impossible, your highness. In a monarchy there can be but one sovereign. The Court must surround that sovereign. Now, permit me to observe, there are two Courts, and something like two sovereigns."

"I am not conscious, madame," replies the Dauphin, with dignity, "what action of my life, justifies such an accusation. If his Majesty desires to reprimand me, as a father, I ask the favour of hearing it from his own lips."

"Monseigneur," replies Madame de Maintenon,

with affected humility, "it is his Majesty who speaks by my voice. I am less than nothing other than through him. If you desire to know what causes his displeasure, it is that in the magnificent fêtes you give at Choisy he observes that one most important element of society is omitted—an element his Majesty considers essential."

"What element, madame?"

"That of the Church, your Highness."

The Dauphin is suddenly convulsed with a fit of violent laughter, and takes a hasty leave.

"The Church at Choisy, *ma foi!*" he says aloud when he has safely passed the anteroom and is well beyond hearing. "My old master Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and the Versailles Jesuits assisting at midnight fêtes at Choisy—what a notion! I must tell this to Mademoiselle Choin. How she will laugh!"

Charlotte de Bavière, second wife of Philippe d'Orléans, brother of the King, hated the "old woman," as she called Madame de Maintenon. She saw through her and despised her. Madame de Maintenon returned her animosity with interest, but she dared not provoke her. There was something about this frank, downright German princess that was not to be trifled with. Whatever her

eccentricities might be, they were respected; she was left in peace to drink as much beer and to eat as many *saucissons* as the peculiarity of her constitution required.

In person she was actually repulsive; her pride was a by-word and a jest; but she was a faithful friend and a true wife, and continued to live with her heartless and effeminate husband, Monsieur, in peace.

On her son, the Duc de Chartres, afterwards the Regent Orléans, she doted. In her eyes he was perfect. She was either blind or indifferent to his vices. But even he was not exempt from the violence of her temper. When she was told that he had consented to a marriage with Mademoiselle de Blois, daughter of Madame de Montespan, she struck him in the face. Then she flew to the King. The doors of the royal bedchamber are closed by the attendant Swiss, but the angry voices of Charlotte (Madame) and Louis in angry altercation, penetrate into the gallery of the Œil de Bœuf, where the Court awaited the moment of the royal lever.

"Sire," Madame is heard to say in her guttural German-French accent, "I am come to forbid the marriage of my son with Mademoiselle de Blois."

"How, my sister?" replies the full, deep voice of the King, that voice which usually created so profound an impression on the nerves of those whom he addressed.

"Yes, to forbid it. Had your Majesty desired an alliance between my son and a daughter of your consort, Maria Theresa, I should have considered it my duty to submit."

"Oh!" exclaims the King in a loud voice, and quick steps are heard pacing up and down the room, "you would have condescended to accept a princess-royal for your daughter-in-law!"

"Certainly, Sire; but because I committed a *mésalliance* myself in marrying your brother, Philippe d'Orléans——"

"*Pardieu!* madame," breaks in the King. "Do you talk of a *mésalliance* with a grandson of Henry the Great?"

"Certainly I do, your Majesty. What was Henry the Great, but an obscure Prince of Béarn, a beggarly little State among the valleys of the Pyrenees? Does your Majesty think that the hundred quarterings of my escutcheon will gain lustre by the arms of Bourbon?"

Louis is heard to stamp on the floor. "Madame," he cries, in so loud a voice that it echoes into every

corner of the Œil de Bœuf, "Madame, you forget yourself. How dare you come here to insult me?"

"Sire, I come here to tell you the truth. My son, the Duc de Chartres, has forgotten himself by listening for one instant to your proposal. With my own hand I have chastised him as he deserves. I do not forget myself, whatever others may do. Philippe is too good for any princess in Europe. The blood in his veins is that of my ancestors—the Princes Palatine of the Rhine. We laugh at your modern houses—we laugh! Philippe is the best man in your Court. He knows everything—painting, music, poetry, science. None of you can understand him. You are too ignorant."

"Madame," the King is heard to say, "have a care—you are going too far!"

"No, my brother, I have not gone far enough," rejoins Madame. "You have forgotten the siege of Mons, where he fought under your own eyes—also Steinkerque and Nerwinde. It is your fault that Philippe does not command your armies. He is equal to it. Who would not have such a husband? Sire, my son, the Duc de Chartres, shall never wed with your bastard!"

Louis is heard to stamp upon the floor. Then, in a voice hoarse with rage, he replies, "Madame,

I shall hold my brother responsible for your insolence."

"Why have you provoked it, then?" is the reply in a calmer tone. Charlotte de Bavière has evidently relieved her own violence by exciting that of the King. "I have a right to resist such a disgraceful proposal. Withdraw your marriage, and I am again your good sister and friend as heretofore."

"We shall see, Madame, we shall see!" shouts the King, whose usual courtesy towards women is not proof against such an attack.

"Yes, Sire, we shall see. No person on earth shall make me sanction a blot on my name. My opposition shall not be only in words. The Duc de Chartres is my only son. I will stop the marriage in your presence. I will stop it at the altar of the chapel-royal."

"Madame, your pride has turned your head. But your husband, my brother, shall obey me."

"Your brother, Sire, will, I know, in this, as in all else, be advised by me. I can defend the honour of his house much better than he can himself, and he knows it. Your brother will do his duty, I shall do mine. I wish your Majesty good day."

The sound of the King's cane is audible, striking

heavily on the floor as he strides up and down the room. The door of his bedchamber opens; Charlotte de Bavière, crimson in the face, appears. She calls her people together, and hastily departs, followed by the wondering glances of the courtiers, standing in groups about the Œil de Bœuf.

The King fearing that there was no chance of overcoming the opposition of Madame, either by persuasions or by threats, consulted Madame de Maintenon. With characteristic duplicity, she advised that what could not be done openly, must be brought about by stratagem. She sent for the Abbé Dubois, the *ame damnée* of the young Duke, his tutor and his companion, and by promises of money and speedy preferment she completely made him her own. Dubois promised to hurry on the marriage, with or without the consent of Madame. The Duke, who loved his mother, and respected her scruples, only yielded when Dubois artfully represented to him the certain loss of all influence, as well as the personal animosity of the King, if he refused.

Philippe d'Orléans met Mademoiselle de Blois in the apartment of Madame de Maintenon. The marriage took place at Versailles.

Madame was furious at what she termed her

"dishonour." She wept, abused, menaced, and scolded by turns. But finding that there was no redress, that the marriage was legal, and that further opposition might rouse the vengeance of the King, she gradually cooled down and received her new daughter-in-law with tolerable civility; particularly as the marriage-portion of Mademoiselle de Blois continued the possession of the Palais Royal, with all its pictures, sculptures, and valuables, in the Orléans family, a gift which somewhat served to gild the bitter pill she was called on to swallow.

This marriage did not improve the Duke's conduct or character. He was galled by what he had been forced to do; his temper was soured; his excesses increased. Nor was the Duchess of a disposition to endear herself to any husband. Imperious, luxurious, and bitter-tongued, she always forgot that her mother, Madame de Montespan, was not the wife of her father, and treated the Duke as her inferior. He bore her extravagant pride, and listened to her harangues, reproaches, and taunts (expressed with real eloquence) in silence. Sometimes he called her *Madame Lucifer*.

With such parents their children grew up in habits of licentiousness, only equalled by the imperial ladies of Old Rome.

The Duchesse de Berry—the eldest of the Regent's daughters—kept her court at the Luxembourg with regal pomp. She received ambassadors seated on a throne, surmounted by a canopy covered with the lilies of France. But she did not think it beneath her dignity to do the honours of certain *petits soupers* at the Palais Royal—too well known to need further mention here.

Her sister, Mademoiselle de Valois, was as remarkable for her beauty as for her lack of virtue.

Mademoiselle d'Orléans—third daughter of the Regent—was, if possible, more wanton than her sisters. To the eternal disgrace of the Church she was elected Abbess of Chelles. "*Tel père, tel fils*," says the proverb.

CHAPTER LXIX.

AT MARLY.

THERE is a lane on the heights over Paris, sometimes embowered by wooded hedge-rows, sometimes skirted by open vineyards; this lane leads from Saint-Germain to Marly.

Below the village, deep in a narrow gorge, is the site of the once famous palace built by Louis XIV. Trees now wave and cattle browse on turf where once clustered twelve pavilions, linked together by arches and colonnades, in the Italian or villa style, to suit the royal fancy of a summer retreat.

Not a stone has been left by the Revolution; what were once gardens and a park, is now a secluded meadow. Blue-bells, thyme, and primroses carpet the mossy earth; and the thrush, the cuckoo, and the early swallow carol among pale sprays of beech and hazel. There are deep ditches and swampy pools, once carp-ponds and lakes, part

of a plaisance, arranged in the solemn taste of that day, when nature itself was cut and trimmed *à la Louis Quatorze.*

When Louis fixed upon Marly as a residence he was tired of Versailles. He was old, he said, and needed relaxation. He wanted a *folie*, a hermitage—*un rien enfin*—where he could retire from the crowd and the restraints of his Court, sleep three nights in each week, and enjoy the society of his special favourites.

Either the King altered his plan, or his architect (Le Nôtre) disregarded the royal instructions; millions were squandered on a residence, "which was to cost nothing." A forest of full-grown trees was brought from Compiègne, and the expense of draining the marshy soil, and elevating the waters of the Seine into the *Machine de Marly*, was never acknowledged.

What a stiff, solemn tyrant Louis is become! Selfish, exacting, pedantic, intolerant, dreaded by his children and grand-children, and exercising over them the most absolute control. Unhappy royal family, how one pities them! Marly was a dreadful infliction. Ill or well, they must go. The Duchess de Bourgogne might plead her interesting situation, and the positive prohibition of Fagon: no matter,

her name is on the list — she must go. The Duchesse de Berry—that profligate daughter of the Duc d'Orléans — is in her bed seriously ill: her mother, the Duchesse d'Orléans, pleaded for her—in vain; if she could not walk she must be carried—to Marly she must go. She was dragged thither in a boat.

Madame de Maintenon herself dared to confess to no ache or pain that availed to rescue her from standing in the cold winds on frosty mornings—for the King loved the open air, and did not fear weather—beside him while he fed the fat carp in marble basins, decided upon a fresh alley to be cut through the woods, or upon a new cascade which was to fall from the hills, or a larger pavilion to be added to those already built.

Nothing could be a greater proof of favour than to be included in the "list" to Marly. It was an honour more craved for than a ribbon or a place at Court. The names of the distinguished few were written down in the King's own hand (a very bad specimen of caligraphy), after due consultation with Madame de Maintenon. She was fond of Marly, hence its favour as a residence. She had herself superintended the building, seated in her gilt sedan chair, the King, hat

in hand, standing by her side. At Marly she could better isolate him than at Versailles. His loneliness threw him more under her influence and under that of the Duc de Maine. These two, pupil and governess, perfectly understand each other. There is to be a codicil to the royal will, virtually passing over the Duc d'Orléans, his nephew, to invest Maine with all the powers of a Regent. Madame de Maintenon represents this hypocritical son of De Montespan as a simple-hearted, unostentatious man, wholly occupied by his attendance on his Majesty and with his classical studies. The King, whose personal activity is diminished, and whose powers of mind are impaired, believes it. Louis, once renowned as the finest horseman, sportsman, runner, dancer, shot, and charioteer, driving four horses with ease and grace, in France, is now stiff and somewhat infirm. Too indolent to move about and inquire for himself, he sees and hears only through Madame de Maintenon. To others he is an unbending autocrat.

If Louis is feared as a parent he is hated as a Sovereign. The denunciations of his ci-devant Protestant wife in the interests of his salvation lash him into inexpressible terror of perdition. She suggests that he can best expiate the excesses

of his former life by a holocaust to the Almighty of all the heretics within his realm. The Jesuits press him sorely. Terrified by threats of awful judgments upon impenitent sovereigns, Louis signs the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He expels the Jansenists, destroys their pleasant refuge on a wooded hill near Maintenon, accepts the Bull *Unigenitus*, exiles the Cardinal de Noailles, and fills the state prisons with recusant bishops.

The whole of France is in indescribable confusion. The south, where the reformed faith prevails, is deluged with blood. Many thousands of industrious and orderly citizens doom themselves to perpetual exile rather than abjure the Protestant faith.

Le Grand Monarque is now a lonely, melancholy old man. Defeat has dogged his armies; the elevation of his grandchild, Philip, to the throne of Spain has well-nigh brought France to destruction. Death has been busy with his family: the Dauphin is dead; his son, the Duc de Bourgogne, is dead; Adelaide de Savoie, his wife, most justly dear to Louis, is also dead; and now there only remains one little life, their son, the infant Duc d'Anjou, between himself and the extinction of his direct line. The Court at Marly is as lugubrious and

austere as Madame de Maintenon and the Jesuits can make it.

Yet a shadow of the pomp and etiquette of Versailles is still kept up. On certain days after dinner, which takes place at noon, his Majesty receives the royal family. The folding doors of the royal suite are thrown open, and Louis appears. His hat with over-topping feathers is on his head, one hand is placed upon the breast of his coat, the other rests upon an ormolu table. He wears a diamond star; and a blue ribbon is passed across his breast. His coat is of black velvet, his waistcoat of red satin richly wrought with gold, and he wears diamonds in his shoe-buckles and in his garters. On his head is a ponderous black wig, raised high on the forehead. This black wig gives his thin, hatchet-shaped face, seamed with wrinkles, a ghastly look. Louis changes his wigs many times each day to suit various occasions. He has wigs for all emergencies. In figure he is much shrunk, and is slightly bent. As he stands, his hand resting on the table for support, every movement is studied to impose silence and awe. To the day of his death he is majestic, and has the grandest manners in the world.

The royal family, conducted through galleries and colonnades lined with exotics and orange-trees (for Louis loves orange-flowers, all other scents and essences, however, being forbidden), pass before him. They wear mantles or mantelets according to their rank. To the obeisances of those who enjoy the honour of the *fauteuil* his Majesty returns a decided bow. Others who occupy *tabourets* only, receive but a qualified acknowledgment. People who sit on *pliants* are not received at Marly at all.

After the reception come the visits. Those who by their rank are entitled to receive as well as to pay visits, flutter backwards and forwards, with painful activity. Madame la Duchesse or Madame la Princesse rushes out of one door and in at another, shouldering her train, to salute a royal personage and return before more company arrive to visit herself. Sometimes a call of ceremony is arranged to Saint-Germain, situated about two miles from Marly, where the unhappy James II. and his Queen, Mary of Modena, reside, as annuitants on the royal bounty. Here the question as to who should wear mantles and who mantelets, who should have *fauteuils* and who *tabourets*, complicates itself to such an extent (the etiquette of the English Court having also to be duly considered) that even his

Majesty grows embarrassed, and cuts the Gordian knot by not sitting down at all. He exchanges a few casual phrases with the exiled Stuarts *standing*, and forthwith returns to the *rural retreat* of Marly.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER LXX.

"THE END."

On St. Louis day, 25th of August, 1715, the King, then seventy-seven years old, felt seriously indisposed. The disease from which he suffered was at first called sciatica. On the 15th he dined in his bedroom at one o'clock. Later he was able to rise and was carried into the saloon of Madame de Maintenon, where he met his ministers. Next day he presided at the council of state held in a room adjoining his bedroom. On the 25th he was sensibly worse. On the 28th, in consequence of fatal symptoms, his surgeon Maréchal proposed to amputate his leg. The aged King scanned the surgeon's face attentively.

"How long should I last then?" he asked.

Maréchal's hand was on Louis's wrist. His pulse did not vary while he waited for an answer.

"In that case," returned Maréchal, "your

Majesty might hope to survive some days, perhaps some weeks longer."

"Then it is not worth while," was the reply in a steady voice. "How long can I live *now*, Maréchal? Tell me the truth."

"Till Wednesday most probably, your Majesty."

"Ah! my death is to be on Wednesday. It is well. It is not so hard to die as I had thought."

He said no more at that time. Madame de Maintenon sat beside him. Père Letellier, his confessor, and a Jesuit, hovered about his bed. In his hand was a paper concerning the Bull *Unigenitus*, which he urged the King to sign. So merciless was his persistence, that the attendants turned him out of the room. The Duc de Maine, and his brother, the Comte de Toulouse, watched. The royal will and codicil, sealed with seven seals, making Maine virtually Regent, was walled up until the King's death. The parliament was known to be in favour of the Duc d'Orléans. It was needful to be first in the field. Maine never took his eyes off his father. There lay that father, his prominent features sharpened by approaching death, upon his bed, such as we see it now, for no other monarch has lain in it since; the tester and framework of dark wood, from which gloomy satin curtains hang,

carved and gilt, and guarded by a *ruelle* or balustrade of gilded pillars, which none dare pass. Upon his feet lay a counterpane, worked by the pupils of Saint-Cyr. On the walls, near enough for his eye to rest upon, hung the portrait of his mother, Anne of Austria, and two other pictures—St. John, by Raphael, and David, by Domenichino. These pictures never left him, even on his shortest journeys. On the mantlepiece, near the bed, was a bust of his dead favourite, Adelaide de Savoie.

At the King's desire, Madame de Ventadour brought in the five-year old Duc d'Anjou, son of the Duc de Bourgogne, his great-grandson and successor. "Allow me to kiss him, madame," said Louis, courteous to the last. The child was laid upon the bed, and burst out crying. Madame de Ventadour took him in her arms to comfort him. "My child," said Louis, bending his dim eyes upon the rosy-cheeked boy, "you will soon be King over a great people. Give thanks to God for all you possess. Keep peace with your neighbours. I have loved war too much. Do all that I have left undone." Again and again he kissed the frightened child, ere he would let him go.

Then he desired to speak with such nobles and courtiers as waited without. "I die," he said, "in

the Catholic faith. I am myself ignorant of the merits of the various schisms which divide it. I have followed such advice as was given me. If I have erred, my advisers alone are responsible, not I. I call God to witness that what I say is true. Gentlemen, I bid you all good-bye. Forget my bad example. Pray for me."

Then the dying monarch turned his face towards Madame de Maintenon, who was seated within the *ruelle* of the bed. "Madame," he said in a low voice, "I regret no one but you. I have not made you happy." His voice hitherto firm, now faltered. "But I have one consolation in leaving you," he added, "we shall soon meet again." He tried to look at her, but Madame de Maintenon turned from him with disgust. She shuddered.

"What a rendezvous!" she muttered half aloud. "He cares for no one but himself." Bolduc, the King's apothecary, was near, and heard her say so. That very day she left him while he dozed, and drove away to Saint-Cyr.

On Sunday, the 1st of September, Louis died. His confessor, the Jesuit Letellier, never returned. Madame de Maintenon remained at Saint-Cyr. Save the Cardinal de Rohan, and the parish priest of Versailles, all had forsaken him. No sooner had he

breathed his last, than precautions were necessary to guard his body from insult.

While the first lord in waiting, standing at the central window within the royal bedchamber which overlooks the Cour de Marbre, the town of Versailles, and the forest, broke his bâton of office, shouting in a loud voice, "The King is dead! Long live the King!" blasphemous songs and brutal jests passed from group to group of low women gathered along the streets.

When the funeral procession left Versailles, almost secretly in the twilight, reaching the Bois de Boulogne and the plain of Saint-Denis by tracks and country roads, crowds followed it, bellowing horrible imprecations. Along the causeway, outside the barriers of Versailles, temporary tents were pitched, where peasants stood, glass in hand, to toast the corpse with curses. These peasants and the townsmen of Versailles had heard of millions squandered on royal mistresses, while the people starved; of war abroad and persecutions at home; of intolerance which spared no one; of ruin, exile, imprisonment, and torture. The country people and the populace did not acknowledge the dead as Louis the Great. The citizens hated him. These men neither knew nor cared that he had a

sonorous voice, a measured and solemn delivery that gave weight to his smallest utterances, that leading a life of vice he observed outward decorum, that he had a majestic presence and a stately manner. These men weighed him—manners against acts, life against words—and found him wanting. Posterity readjusted the scales and pronounced them just. The great Revolution declared the balance. Louis XVI. expiated the crimes of his ancestors on the scaffold.

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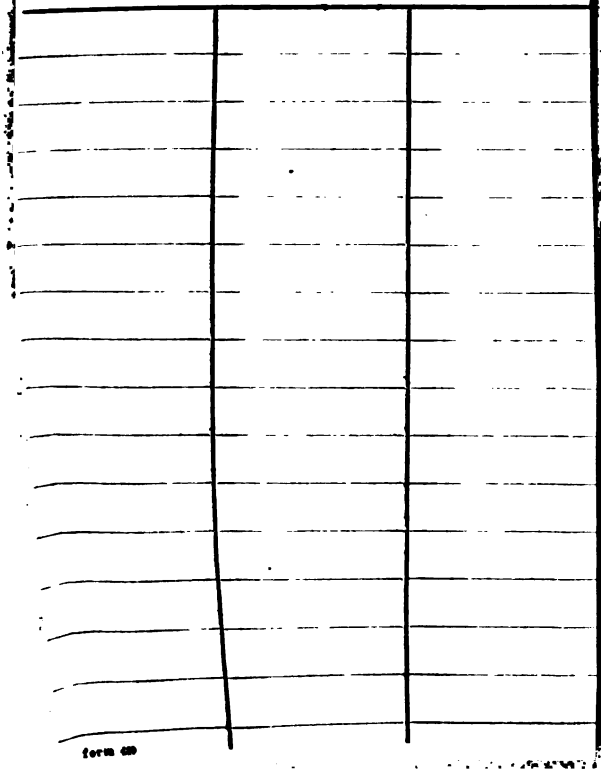

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